PATTERNS OF POWER

Soviet Mongolia

The Complete Study

1911 – 1992

A conquest with no instrument, a sovereignty conceded at great cost
and spent in another country's bargain, and an order whose belief
was attacked by the government of the people who held it

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with Claude (Anthropic)

Held as tested, not revealed
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Front Matter

PREFACE AND OUTLINE

Front matter · how this study was made, the disciplines it holds itself to, and a map of its fourteen parts

A case study in the Patterns of Power series · Thomas J. Bryan with Claude (Anthropic) · held as tested, not revealed

The collaboration

This is a case study in the *Patterns of Power* series, applying the series' framework to Mongolia, from the founding of the Mongolian People's Party in a Urga courtyard in June 1920 and the taking of the capital in July 1921 to the hunger strike of March 1990 and the constitution of February 1992. The framework is a lens for reading how any order of power is founded, dressed, and held: the floor of force beneath every order, the robe of doctrine laid over the floor to make the force cheap, the settlement that divides the spoils, the cost column in which each subject prices defection, the seam that manages the belief on which the whole depends, the default by which an elite coordinates without instruction, and — running through all of it — position logic, the proposition that rulers in like positions converge on like solutions because a position poses a problem with only a few good answers.

Mongolia was chosen because it removes an instrument the series had been relying on without noticing. Every other case in the collection has a document: a treaty, an annexation law, an admitting statute, an agreement with a clause about which text prevails. Mongolia has none, and the concession ran the other way — a flag, a currency, an army, a foreign ministry, and from 1961 a seat in the General Assembly of the United Nations, all of it maintained for seventy years at real cost by a power that ap-

pointed the country's ministers and vetted its politburo. Sovereignty is the most expensive thing an apex can concede and it was conceded here and nowhere else in the file. What that concession bought, and what it cost the men who received it, is the spine of the study. The case also removes the vocabulary: *colony* was excluded by doctrine, *annexation* by the fact, and what remained described a relationship between equals with no asymmetry in it at all.

The study was built the way the series is built, one module at a time. The author brought the framework, the direction, and the judgement of the whole, and held the collaboration to its disciplines; Claude, Anthropic's model, did the research — verifying every load-bearing quotation, date, and figure by web search against a source reproducing the primary text before any module was written — and produced the drafts, applying the framework module by module, each presented and confirmed before the next was begun. One module was withdrawn and rewritten from the ground up when the author identified that it had located a decisive calculation in the wrong capital; the revision, not the original, appears here. The framework's concepts are the series'; the Mongolian application, and the refinements it yielded, are the work of the collaboration.

Its engine throughout is the method of information asymmetry. The study exists to show the gap between what was said and what was done, and it works by setting the exact words of one document beside the exact words of another and letting the distance speak — the revolutionary government's written promise of July 1921 that everything except religion would be subject to gradual change, beside the destruction of seven hundred monasteries sixteen years later; Lenin's own 1909 warning, quoting Engels, that a declared war on religion is the surest way to revive it, beside the clause in his 1920 colonial theses that licensed exactly such a war in countries classified as backward; a defence minister praising fraternal and disinterested aid in May 1968, beside the secret agreement he had signed fourteen

months earlier stationing foreign divisions on his country's soil. It lays out the arithmetic and leaves the sum to the reader. It does not preach the conclusion, and it does not open or close by asking whether Mongolia was a colony.

The disciplines

Five rules govern every module.

Quotation. Public-domain primary sources — decrees, constitutions, treaties, party orders, published speeches, official statements — are quoted exactly, at the length the argument needs, because in a legal fiction the precise wording *is* the evidence. Modern copyrighted scholarship is paraphrased, briefly, and credited.

No fabrication. No quotation, date, attribution, or figure is ever invented or reconstructed from memory. What cannot be verified is dropped or flagged, never guessed. This case required that rule more often than most, because a great deal of its record reaches English at two or three removes from Mongolian and Russian originals; where a source is a modern scholar's rendering, or a recollection published years after the event, or a popular history the study could not trace to a document, the module says so at the point of use. Contested figures are given as ranges with their provenance named, and in this field every mortality number is a political act in at least three countries.

Gravity without partisanship. Suffering is held with gravity, and the study refuses both flattery and demonisation — it names the legal fiction as fiction and explains the order's logic without excusing it. Its recurring watchword is *legibility is not pardon*: to understand how a thing was done is not to forgive its being done. Where an achievement was real it is credited at full weight on the same page as the cost.

Contribution. Every module returns a refinement to the framework, stated plainly in its closing section, rather than merely applying the framework to the case.

Held as tested, not revealed. The pattern is treated as something discovered and tested against the evidence, not handed down as doctrine — a lens laid over the record, a tendency and never a law.

What Mongolia added to the framework

Because this is the collection's first case of a holding kept for where it sits rather than what it yields, and its first in which the conquered order's belief was attacked by the conquered's own government, it was able to name features the other studies could not reach. Chief among the refinements the study contributed: that the *Prevent* family of elite solutions has a cheap variant, available wherever an interpreter class is headed by an office filled by procedure rather than by birth, so that an apex can prescribe the catchment of that office by decree and guarantee that the country's supreme legitimating authority can never again be one of its own dynasts; that the size of a floor of force is set by which layer of the conquered order it is aimed at, so that taking a government is cheap and taking a formation is the expensive operation, and the curve of force over time is therefore U-shaped rather than declining; that where the displaced order was itself settled in persons rather than land, the incoming settlement's decisive act is the destruction of the old register rather than the creation of a new category, and the tell is that the conqueror reaches for a naming law; that a legitimating claim which is substantially *true* binds its wearer more tightly than a fabricated one, because it must be continuously performed rather than merely asserted, and that its prohibitions cluster at its strongest point rather than its weakest; that a formation is not stored in its institution but in households, so that an apparatus which can raze seven hundred monasteries in eighteen months cannot reach a hundred thousand tents in fifty years; that the exit dial can be closed by provision rather than by barrier, and that where the extracted asset is livestock

the extractor's own ledger contains an insurance term that pushes the subsistence floor up rather than down; that where a monopsony also issues the currency of settlement the terms of trade become undeterminable in principle, so that both parties can sincerely and permanently believe they subsidised the other; that concealment has a third form, distinct from censorship and from annulment, in which the fact is conceded and the instrument authorising it is hidden, depriving a population not of information but of standing; that a settlement granting its elite no property has not abolished the elite's property but deferred it, the note falling due at privatisation; that the residue of liberty does not require domestic factions, only that whoever writes the rules fears capture, and that the protection is therefore shaped by the fear and decays when the threat changes shape; that a positional holding is shed not when it becomes unprofitable but when the apex settles with the power it was insurance against, at which moment its value goes negative because its evacuation is the consideration; and that the destruction of coordination calls the metabolic note but does not determine the currency, which is paid in mass death only where possession of the asset, exit, and substitution are closed along with it.

The arc

A landscape opening and twelve modules, each with a framework function and its own evocative title.

Landscape — the two societies on the eve of conquest. **The Incarnation Would Be Found in Tibet.** A steppe whose imperial seal had been surrendered a century before the conquest that mattered, a church installed from outside and naturalised until it was simply the world, and a Manchu decree of 1758 that made the country's supreme religious authority permanently un-Mongol — against a metropole that wrote down what was to be done about the clergy of backward countries eight weeks before it met a single Mongol.

1 — The Floor of Force. **Everything Except Religion.** Four hundred horsemen against a state that produced almost nobody willing to die for it, and a written promise within seventy-two hours that one thing would not be touched; then the second and far larger floor laid sixteen years later against precisely that thing, by a commission constituted in Moscow and staffed by Mongolians.

2 — The Settlement. **A List of Conscripts.** A conquest that found no land to divide and divided persons instead; a constitution translated in Moscow whose thirty-fifth article decided who was a person; the abolition of clan names in 1925 and the seventy years it took a country to forget its ancestors; and the single property grant this order ever made, whose price was leaving the monastery.

3 — The Robe. **The Stone at Gurvan Nuur.** A legitimating claim that was substantially true and therefore had to be bought rather than merely asserted, at a price running from a currency to a horse-trade in the Security Council — and the summer of 1962 in which the claim could not survive the name of the man who founded the nation.

4 — Formation. **To Out-Bismarck Bismarck.** The doctrine on religion as its authors wrote it, including the passage in which Engels calls the prohibition of religion a folly certain to revive it; the two registers of that doctrine and the category that decided which applied; the largest formation any conqueror in this collection built for the conquered; and the count taken fifty years later.

5 — The Cost Column. **The Same Winter, Twice.** A country with no walls and eight thousand kilometres of frontier, whose people owned everything on the hoof and could have walked away in any direction; two winters of comparable cold, twenty-three years apart, that killed a third of the national herd and then an eighth; and what a herdsman was actually pricing when he stayed.

6 — Extraction. **At Nominal Prices.** A monopsony built by outbidding the competition and then expelling it; a farmgate price set in the 1960s and left unchanged until 1991, sealed off from every world price; half a million horses delivered during the war; and a debt of eleven and a half billion in a currency that no longer existed, settled at three cents in the dollar.

7 — Information and Suppression. **Fraternal and Disinterested.** An order that could not hide fifty thousand foreign soldiers and did not try, and hid instead the agreement under which they stood; three occasions on which a statement about the world was converted into a fact about a man's allegiance; and the one measurement in the country that could not be annulled, because every family could count its own animals.

8 — Elite Coordination and the Default. **His Subject Was Scientific Communism.** How an arrangement holds the people inside it when none of them owns anything; sixty-two years of removals in which the sentence never changed and the penalty steadily fell; and the moment in 1991 when a settlement that had given its elite no property finally paid out.

9 — Plurality or Foreclosure. **How Many Would Have to Be Bought.** A sovereign state with a constitution, a parliament, courts and a seat at the United Nations, in which not one of those things ever restrained anything; an outside defined by having relatives across a border; and the reason a country with none of the usual prerequisites wrote itself a constitution designed to be expensive to capture.

10 — Change and Collapse. **A Year For Each Obstacle.** Why the apex did not do what the apex had always done; how a country of two million came to appear on a list of three items that Beijing required Moscow to clear; and the difference between an asset that stops paying and one that has already been spent.

11 — The Grim Accounting. **A Million Tonnes, and Forty Thousand.** The sword's column in full; against it, at equal weight, the five hundred thousand hectares of wheat that came to supply more than half the calories a Mongolian ate; and the

question of why a country that destroyed its coordination as completely as Kazakhstan had in 1930 buried its animals rather than its people.

12 — Convergence and Divergence. **The Other Half of the Nation.** The eight readings that came back the same as everywhere else and the seven that came back inverted; and the argument a Mongolian makes at the end of it, which rests on a control case of four and a half million people living two hundred miles to the south.

A note on sources. This front matter is descriptive and makes no primary-source claims of its own; every factual assertion about the case is established, with its sources and with its limits marked, in the module it summarises. A standing limitation should be recorded here and is repeated in the modules: the record of this case is in Mongolian, Russian, Manchu, Chinese and Tibetan, and what this study could reach is English-language scholarship, translation and reference material. Several of its load-bearing items — the self-referential secrecy clause of the 1967 stationing agreement, the collapse of fodder production from over a million tonnes to forty thousand, the reading of a census category as *shabi* — are flagged in place as requiring verification against better sources before they are built upon elsewhere. The framework it describes is the series'; the disciplines it lists are the ones the modules hold themselves to and document in their own closing notes. *Part of the collection* Patterns of Power. *Tested, never revealed.*

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Landscape

THE INCARNATION WOULD BE FOUND IN TIBET

Landscape · the order the revolutionaries found and the state that formed them — a Chinggisid steppe whose imperial seal had been surrendered to Mukden a century before the conquest that mattered, a church installed from outside and naturalised until it was simply the world, an apex the previous conqueror had made structurally un-Mongol, and a metropole that in June 1920 wrote down what was to be done about the clergy of backward countries eight weeks before it had met a single Mongol

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Three layers and an interval

The revolutionaries who took Urga in July 1921 described what they had overthrown as feudalism, and the word did a great deal of work, because it collapsed into one undifferentiated darkness a country that was in fact the residue of three separate conquests laid one on another, each of which had been resisted, had won, and had then been forgotten as a conquest by the people living inside it.

The oldest layer was Chinggisid. Descent from Chinggis Khan was the criterion of legitimate khanal authority across the eastern steppe, and it was a criterion with teeth: Galdan Boshogtu, the Dzungar who came closest to unifying the Mongols in the seventeenth century, could not claim it, and his rivals said so. The second layer was Buddhist, and it was installed within a documented lifetime. In 1578, at Lake Kokonor, Altan Khan of

the Tümed met the Gelugpa hierarch Sonam Gyatso and the two exchanged titles, Altan conferring on the lama the Mongolian *dalai* — ocean — which attached to Sonam Gyatso and, retrospectively, to his two predecessors. Sonam Gyatso spent the following decade among the Mongols; a monastery was raised at the site of the meeting; and by 1585 Abadai Khan of the Khalkha had founded Erdene Zuu on the ruins of Karakorum. The Gelugpa did not arrive into a vacuum. They arrived into a shamanic religion which they then set about suppressing, and the scholarship on that suppression describes an active missionary campaign with the sacrifices prohibited by edict — which is to say that the faith a Mongol herdsman in 1920 would have described as simply what the world was had been imposed on his ancestors, against their practice, within thirteen generations.

The third layer was Manchu, and it arrived in two motions. In February 1635 the son of the dead Ligdan Khan was surrounded by Later Jin cavalry and surrendered, handing over the imperial seal of the Yuan; Hong Taiji took the title of Great Khan and proclaimed the Qing the following year. That transaction is worth pausing on, because it means that when the Qing came for the Khalkha of Outer Mongolia half a century later, the Chinggisid apex had *already* been vacated — not by the conqueror who was about to arrive but by an earlier one, and by surrender rather than by battle. The Khalkha khans who assembled at Dolonnor in 1691 and swore to the Kangxi emperor were not giving up a throne. The throne had gone to Mukden in 1635, and what they were doing was choosing a protector against Galdan, whose armies had driven them south the year before and who held the identical steppe legitimacy problem they did.

Between the second and third layers there is one further thing to hold, because the study will need it at the end. Between 1911 and 1921 — with a Chinese occupation cutting the decade nearly in half — something local governed this country. That interval is where the counterfactual lives, and the temptation is to

hand it to the incoming regime's own description of it, which was that it was the same darkness with the Manchus removed.

What the Qing built, and what it forbade

The Qing settlement of Khalkha was made in persons, not in ground, and this is the fact that most needs holding, because every subsequent conqueror had to work with what it produced.

The four Khalkha aimags were divided into eighty-six banners — *khoshuu* — each under a hereditary prince, the *jasag*, who collected the taxes, ran the courts, allocated the pastures and mobilised the men. The princes were graded into ranks, given seals inscribed in Manchu and Mongolian, paid stipends from the imperial treasury, and required to have their successions confirmed at Beijing through the office for frontier affairs that the Manchus had built in the 1630s to run their Inner Asian dependencies. The arrangement was codified: a Mongol code first issued in the 1740s, printed in Mongolian, Manchu and Chinese in its 1789 edition, and replaced early in the following century by the regulations of that same office. Alongside the secular banners stood the ecclesiastical estates, of which the largest by far was the Great Shabi, the personal following of the Jebtsundamba Khutuktu, which from 1723 was administratively independent of the four aimags and whose people were exempt from most of the taxes and corvée the banner population owed.

The operative clause in the whole arrangement was not a tax rate. It was that a Mongol could not cross a banner boundary without permission. A man was born into a banner, was the subject of its prince, and stayed there; the confederation that could raise armies across the steppe had been decomposed into ninety-odd administrative cells that could not combine. That is a settlement performed on people rather than on soil — the conversion of a man's standing in a mobile society into a fixed entry on a register — and it was done nearly two hundred years before anyone in Moscow had a theory requiring populations to be

sorted into categories with different legal capacities. The terrain the Bolsheviks arrived in did not need to be taught that a person's official classification governed his life. It had been taught that already, and had stopped noticing.

The incarnation would be found in Tibet

In the summer of 1756 a Khalkha prince, Chingünjav, left his post and raised a rebellion. It never commanded more than a couple of thousand men and no other prince of consequence joined it; he was taken to Beijing and executed with almost his whole family, and punitive columns went through Khalkha killing those they could find. The trigger had been the execution earlier that year of a brother of the second Jebtsundamba Khutuktu — a man of the Chinggisid line — and the Khalkha nobility was gravely disturbed by it. Then, in 1758, the second Jebtsundamba died, and the Tüsheet Khan shortly after him.

What the Qianlong emperor did next is the single most consequential structural act in two centuries of Qing rule over Khalkha, and it is not a military act. He decreed that all future incarnations of the Jebtsundamba Khutuktu were to be found among the population of Tibet.

Consider precisely what that removed. The first two Jebtsundambas had been Mongol princes of the highest nobility and direct descendants of Chinggis Khan; the first was the son of a Tüsheet Khan. In that configuration the supreme religious authority of the Khalkha and their supreme dynastic legitimacy could recur in one person, and had — which is another way of saying that Khalkha Mongolia was capable of producing, in a single body, a claimant whom both the herdsmen and the princes would have had to obey. After 1758 it was not. Every Jebtsundamba from the third to the eighth was a Tibetan. The eighth, the man who would be raised to the throne of an independent Mongolia in 1911, was born in Lhasa in 1869, the son of a Lhasa aristocrat who had served the Twelfth Dalai Lama.

The Qing had solved its problem inside the hierarchy — the standing difficulty that the capable man a centre needs is the same man who could replace it — by the method of recruiting the crucial post from outside the population that might otherwise fill it. The novelty is where the method was applied. The known instances of that solution take the *administrative and martial* core from outside: slaves, converts, foreigners, denied the ability to pass their position to their sons. Qianlong applied it to the apex of the *interpreter class* — to the one office in the country whose holder could speak with an authority no prince could contradict — and applied it by a mechanism far cheaper than any slave levy, since a reincarnation search is conducted by clerics and confirmed by a decree, and generates no army, no payroll, and no barracks. It cost a sentence.

And it worked so completely that by 1911 nobody experienced it as foreign. When the Khalkha nobles and high lamas broke with Beijing they raised to the throne the Tibetan whose foreignness was the previous conqueror's design, and they did not regard themselves as installing a stranger. They regarded themselves as restoring a Mongol state.

What the country actually contained

The Bogd Khan's government took a census in 1918, and the numbers are the best we have for the eve.

It counted 542,505 Mongols — 101,792 in the Setsen Khan aimag, 100,224 in Tüsheet Khan, 133,860 in Sain Noyon Khan, 70,241 in Zasagt Khan, some 50,000 in the Khovd region — and, counted separately, about 70,000 persons in the four aimags and 16,000 more in Khövsgöl under a heading which the English-language literature renders as "students" and which in this context is almost certainly *shabi*, the ecclesiastical subjects. With the roughly 100,000 Chinese and 5,000 Russians then living in the country, the total registered was 647,504. Anyone resting weight on the breakdown should collate it against Maiskii's Rus-

sian, from which it descends at more than one remove; the aggregate, however, is stable across the literature, and it means that this was a country of rather more than half a million Mongols in a territory the size of western Europe.

Roughly one person in six of those counted belonged to a monastery rather than to a prince. Mongolian archival work on the Jebtsundamba's own treasuries puts the Great Shabi alone at something approaching a hundred thousand people in ten thousand or so households, with over a hundred monasteries and more than twenty thousand lamas directly under its ministry; the two figures may not be counting the same body, and the honest statement is that the ecclesiastical population lay somewhere between eighty-five and a hundred thousand. The monastery was not only a church. It held animals, took donations of dependent families from nobles, lent at interest, employed, adjudicated, and claimed a share of the male population that has no European parallel. The usual figure for lamas around 1921 is 110,000 in some 700 monasteries, which against a male population of about 300,000 — the 1918 returns give women as only 44.4 per cent of the whole — would be something over a third of all males. That figure is contested and probably counts novices, children, and men who lived at home and kept no vows, and the comparable range given for Inner Mongolia by the scholarly literature is anything from thirty to sixty-five per cent, which is itself a confession of how loose the category is. What is not in doubt is that the monasteries held a large share of the country's wealth — estimates of a fifth are common and should be treated as an order of magnitude — and that the wealth was livestock, since there were 9.6 million head in 1918.

And the country was in debt. The Mongolian ministry of internal affairs estimated in 1921 that the four aimags, excluding the Jebtsundamba's own ministry, owed nine million taels of silver to Chinese firms; other accounts put the total obligation by the mid-1920s at thirty million taels, which contemporaries reckoned at half the value of every animal in Mongolia, and a

Russian estimate of the period held that private debts exceeded the official ones by a factor of two or three. The mechanism was ordinary and is worth naming exactly, because it is the same mechanism a later government would describe as feudal exploitation and would be substantially right about: Chinese trading houses held the supply of tea, cloth, grain and metal, extended credit against it, and the princes — who under Manchu regulation could tax their banner people for their needs — met their own accumulated obligations by taxing the herdsmen. The debt therefore travelled downward from the men who had contracted it to the men who had not. The Qianlong emperor, having crushed Chingünjav, had partially annulled these debts and paid off part of the remainder from the imperial treasury, which is a tolerably exact statement of what the Qing understood the political risk to be.

Two centuries is enough

By 1911 none of this presented itself as arrangement. It presented itself as the world.

A man belonged to a banner because men belong to banners. His prince’s authority came from a seal confirmed at Beijing, and the confirmation was as unremarkable as weather. His faith was Gelugpa Buddhism, whose institutions ran the only schooling in the country, whose calendar scored his year, and whose supreme representative in Mongolia was found in Tibet by procedures no herdsman had ever thought to question. His son might well go to a monastery. That is what the completion of a build looks like: the force has withdrawn to the margins because it is no longer needed, since the population enforces the arrangement on itself and cannot easily conceive of an alternative, and the cost of holding the country has fallen close to the cost of confirming a few dozen successions and paying a few dozen stipends.

Two disciplines have to be held here at once, and the second is the harder.

The first is that naming the origin is not debunking. That Mongolian Buddhism was installed by a khan seeking a patron-priest relationship in 1578, and that its Mongolian apex was made structurally Tibetan by a Manchu decree in 1758, does not make it a fiction, does not make its adherents dupes, and does not make it any less genuinely theirs. A built thing that became real is more durable than a lie and more genuine, and by 1911 this was authentically the Mongols' own world in exactly the way the Manchu emperor's Confucian order was authentically his. The recent scholarship pushes further and should be followed rather than resisted: Johan Elverskog's work on the Mongols under the Qing argues against the tidy account in which the Manchus wielded Buddhism as an instrument of control over a passive people, and attends instead to what the Mongols themselves were doing with it, which was making the empire their own. A study that treats Khalkha Buddhism as a Manchu device will get the whole of this case wrong, because it will then be unable to explain why the assault on it thirty years later cost what it cost.

The second discipline is the one that will be tested for the rest of this study. The arrangement was genuine, believed, cheap, and self-running — and it was also a hierarchy with a hereditary nobility at the top, a population that could not leave its banner, a monastic estate holding a fifth of the wealth and a third of the men, and a debt structure that had ruined a great many herders and was serviced by taxing them. Both of those sentences are true simultaneously. There is a large and attractive literature that treats the pre-1921 steppe as timeless and free, and there is an equally large one, produced after 1921, that treats it as unrelieved oppression waiting for liberation. The first is a romance and the second is a brief. What was there was an old order that had reached the point where it ran on its subjects' own conviction, and that fact is a statement about its durability, not about its justice.

The interval, 1911 to 1921

On 1 December 1911, a provisional government at Urga issued what it called a proclamation to the Mongols, Russians, Tibetans, Chinese and all ecclesiastical and secular commoners, in the name of the khans of the four Khalkha aimags and their princes and lamas. Its operative sentence, in Uradyn Bulag's rendering of the Mongolian, is that having faced towards the golden palace at Beijing and performed the ritual of cutting off relations from the celestial majesty, *we all elevated the Bogd as the Lord and called the state by the name of Mongolia*. On 29 December the Jebtsundamba was installed as Bogd Khan and took the reign title Olnoo Örgögdsön — Elevated by the Many.

Two things about that document matter. The first is its grammar: it is not a claim to have created something but a claim to have severed something, and the state it announces is described by reversion to a name. The second is who signed it. This was a break made by the men the Qing settlement had seated — the princes with the seals and the lamas with the estates — and it was made partly because the late-Qing New Policies had begun to threaten those seats with administrative integration and Chinese colonisation. That does not make the independence spurious. It makes it a conquest's beneficiaries acting when their benefactor could no longer protect their benefits, which is one of the most reliably recurring shapes in the record.

What followed is the material Module 12 will need. The Bogd Khan's government established five ministries, wrote customs and tax regulations, attempted to build a treasury out of duties on the Russian and Chinese trade routes, and — this is the fact that should be held hardest — conducted a population census and a livestock census in 1918 in order to know what it could tax. A state that counts its people and its animals is a state trying to govern rather than merely to reign. It was also a state that failed at most of what it tried: the aristocratic interests it rested on obstructed the fiscal reform, the revenue never ap-

proached what modernisation would have cost, the debts went unpaid, and the attempt to bring the Mongols of Inner Mongolia into the new state was defeated by the powers around it.

Those powers wrote the interval's real history. Russia recognised Mongolia in 1912 but characterised it as autonomous rather than independent; the Russo-Chinese declaration of 1913 reasserted Chinese suzerainty; and the tripartite treaty signed at Kyakhta in the late spring of 1915 — 25 May by the Russian calendar, 7 June by ours, and given as June or as 17 June in different accounts — obliged the Bogd Khan's government to accept autonomy under that suzerainty. Then the Russian state that had been the counterweight collapsed. In the autumn of 1919 the Beiyang government sent General Xu Shuzheng north with the Northwestern Frontier Army; the lower house of the Mongolian assembly refused to pass the document liquidating its own autonomy; Xu occupied Urga anyway, the autonomy was revoked in November, and the Bogd Khan was made to sign and was placed under house arrest. In February 1921 the Chinese garrison was driven out of Urga not by Mongols but by Baron Ungern-Sternberg, a White Russian cavalry commander who restored the Bogd Khan to a throne he did not control and began killing Jews and Bolsheviks in the capital.

So the interval ended with a foreign warlord on the ground, a theocrat under his protection, a treasury empty, a debt of tens of millions of taels outstanding, and every neighbour that had ever guaranteed anything either dissolved or hostile. Whatever else is true of what came next, it did not arrive into a functioning alternative. It arrived into a wreck. That is the honest form of the counterfactual and it should be stated in that form rather than in either of the two convenient ones.

The state that formed the revolutionaries

Now the other side of the ledger, and it has to be dated precisely, because a territory taken in 1921 by a state fighting for

its own existence is not the same conqueror as the one that would take the Baltic in 1940.

In the spring of 1921 the government in Moscow controlled a country in which industrial production had fallen to something like a fifth of pre-war levels, in which peasant risings had to be put down by military campaign, and in which the requisitioning that had fed the towns was about to produce a famine on the Volga. Its Tenth Party Congress met from 8 to 16 March 1921 — while the sailors at Kronstadt, who had helped make the revolution, were in open revolt against it — abandoned grain requisition for the New Economic Policy, and passed a resolution on party unity which banned organised factions within the party itself. The Mongolian People's Party held the meeting that it would later declare to have been its first congress at Kyakhta on 1–3 March, in the same fortnight, a few hundred miles east of nowhere. Seventeen people attended the first session and twenty-six the second.

That is not a coincidence to be made much of, but it is a fact about the instrument. The doctrine the Mongolian revolutionaries were being handed was, at the moment they received it, being hardened at its source: the party that was teaching them how a party works had just made it a disciplinary offence to organise a disagreement inside one.

And the substance of what they were handed had been written down before any of them arrived. On 5 June 1920 — three weeks before the two underground circles in occupied Urga merged and called themselves the Mongolian People's Party, and ten weeks before their delegates reached Irkutsk — Lenin circulated his draft theses on the national and colonial questions for the Second Congress of the Communist International. Point eleven addresses states and nations "in which feudal or patriarchal and patriarchal-peasant relations predominate," and among the things it says must be borne in mind are:

> "second, the need for a struggle against the clergy and other influential reactionary and medieval elements in backward countries;"

and

> "fourth, the need, in backward countries, to give special support to the peasant movement against the landowners, against landed proprietorship, and against all manifestations or survivals of feudalism… It is particularly necessary to exert every effort to apply the basic principles of the Soviet system in countries where pre-capitalist relations predominate—by setting up 'working people's Soviets'."

Reporting to the Congress in July, Lenin was explicit that this was a generalisation drawn from Turkestan, where, he said, pre-capitalist relations predominated, there could therefore be no question of a purely proletarian movement, and there was practically no industrial proletariat — and that the Communists had nevertheless assumed, and must assume, the role of leaders. The theses further held that the backward countries could pass to the Soviet system and thence to communism without going through the capitalist stage, provided the proletariat of the advanced countries assisted them.

Read that as an instruction rather than as an opinion, because that is how it was used. It specifies the categories the terrain must contain — a peasantry, a landowning class, survivals of feudalism, a clergy standing in the way — and it specifies the operations to be performed on each. Mongolia had no peasantry, since it had no settled agriculture worth the name; it had no landowners, since the wealth was in animals and the pasture was not owned; and the largest single property-holding institution in the country was also the only educational system in it and the object of essentially universal devotion. Of the four things the doctrine required to be present, one was present in a

form the doctrine did not anticipate, and it was the one the doctrine had marked for struggle.

The men who carried these instructions in were not sent from Moscow. They were Mongols, and a study that writes them as agents is going to fail. Dogsomyn Bodoo, Soliin Danzan, Damdin Sükhbaatar, Khorloogiin Choibalsan, Darizavyn Losol, Dansranbilegiin Dogsom and Dambyn Chagdarjav — the first seven — came out of two small underground circles formed in Urga under the Chinese occupation, Consular Hill and East Khüree, which merged on 25 June 1920. Their initial reason for going north was neither Marx nor Lenin; it was that they wanted rifles. What happened between then and March 1921 is the formation. Comintern agents encouraged them to send a delegation; they reached Irkutsk in August 1920 and asked for military instructors, ten thousand rifles, artillery, machine guns and money; and they were told that the letter they had brought — a letter obtained from the Bogd Khan through a senior lama — would have to be rewritten in the name of the Party rather than the Khan. Danzan and others went on to Moscow. Sükhbaatar and Choibalsan stayed at Irkutsk for six months of military training. Choibalsan had already spent the war years at a gymnasium there and was the circle's Russian translator. The Comintern's Far Eastern Secretariat resolved on 10 February 1921 to assist the Mongolian struggle with money, guns and instructors; its Mongol-Tibetan section convened the Kyakhta meeting three weeks later; and the men who ran that meeting included the Buryats Elbegdorj Rinchino and Tseveen Jamtsarano — Mongols who were Russian subjects, formed in Russian institutions, fluent in both worlds, and carrying a theory of history.

The Party that emerged had an oath binding each member to recruit ten more. That is the cell, and nobody in Khalkha had invented it.

Reading the landscape against the framework

The conqueror never meets a baseline. What the Party found in 1921 was an order that had reached the pole where belief carries the load and force has withdrawn — and it had reached that pole by being conquered twice, once by a faith installed from Tibet in the 1570s and once by a dynasty that took the imperial seal in 1635 and the Khalkha oaths in 1691.

The refinement this landscape returns concerns the Menu, and it is one item rather than several.

The framework's *Prevent* family — recruit the core from outside the population that could supply a rival class, and deny even those recruits the ability to make their position heritable — is documented in its martial and administrative form: the Ottoman levy of Christian boys, the grant that reverts to the state at death, the fortune confiscated at disgrace. It is an expensive answer. It requires a levy, a training establishment, a payroll, and a permanent apparatus to enforce the non-heritability against men who will spend their lives trying to defeat it, and it corroded within two centuries in the case where it is best documented.

Qianlong's decree of 1758 is the same answer applied to a different leg, and it costs almost nothing. Where the interpreter class is organised around an office filled by recognised reincarnation rather than by birth, an apex can prescribe the *catchment* of that office by decree, and thereby guarantee that the country's supreme legitimating authority can never again be a member of the country's own dynastic line. There is no levy to raise, because the clerics conduct the search; there is no non-heritability to enforce, because the office was never heritable; and there is no class of resentful recruits, because each holder is a child who arrives without a faction. The instrument runs on the conquered order's own machinery, and the men operating it are

its own priests, doing what they sincerely believe to be the finding of a true incarnation.

Two consequences follow, and both are for later modules to test rather than to assume. The first is that this variety of prevention is *invisible to the revealed-preference test in its usual form*, because the expenditure is a sentence rather than a payment; the test asks what an apex paid for when it need not have, and here the apex paid nothing and got the most valuable single thing prevention can buy. Where a case shows an interpreter class whose apex is filled by a procedure rather than by descent, the question to ask is not what was spent but who was permitted into the pool — and that question should now be asked of every case in the corpus where a foreign or centrally-approved hierarch sits atop a local clergy.

The second is a hypothesis about 1921 that the study will have to sustain or abandon. The Qing had already separated, by decree, the office that could command Mongol belief from the lineage that could command Mongol arms. When the Party arrived, it therefore did not face what a conqueror of Khalkha in 1600 would have faced — a single figure who might unify both. It faced a theocrat born in Lhasa, an aristocracy fragmented into eighty-six administrative cells whose people could not lawfully move between them, and a monastic establishment enormously wealthy and enormously believed but constitutionally incapable of producing a khan. Whether that inheritance is what made the next seventy years possible is the question this study is now in a position to ask.

One further observation belongs here without being made a second claim. The settlement this terrain already carried was a settlement of *persons* — banner subject, ecclesiastical subject, noble, commoner — fixed on a register, transmitted by birth, and determining where a man might live and what he owed. The doctrine now arriving would sort persons into classes with different legal capacities and different liabilities to removal, and would present that sorting as the abolition of what it found.

Whether a population two centuries habituated to being classified was thereby easier or harder to reclassify is a real question, and it is not answered here.

A note on sources.

Quoted directly and in the public domain: Lenin's *Draft Theses on National and Colonial Questions*, written 5 June 1920, in the Progress Publishers English translation of the *Collected Works* (Julius Katzer), from the Marxists Internet Archive; his report to the Second Comintern Congress in July 1920 is characterised rather than quoted, from the same archive and from a printed English edition of the three national-question articles. Readers relying on the exact wording of either should specify the edition, as renderings differ in small particulars, and both are translations from the Russian.

The Mongolian proclamation of 1 December 1911 is quoted at one remove, in Uradyn E. Bulag's English rendering with the transliterated Mongolian, from his article "Independence as Restoration: Chinese and Mongolian Declarations of Independence and the 1911 Revolutions" (*Asia-Pacific Journal: Japan Focus*, 2012). I have not seen the Mongolian original and the passage should be collated before further weight is placed on it. The reign title Olnoo Örgögdsön and the 29 December 1911 enthronement are corroborated across reference sources.

The Qianlong decree of 1758 is reported rather than quoted; I have not located the text. Its substance — that after the death of the second Jebtsundamba Khutuktu all future incarnations were to be found in Tibet, and that from the third onward all were Tibetans, the eighth being the son of a Lhasa aristocrat who served the Twelfth Dalai Lama — is given consistently by the National Palace Museum's exhibition materials on the incarnate lamas of the Qing and by the general reference literature, and the argument built on it here rests on that substance rather than on any wording.

The 1918 census figures descend from I. M. Maiskii, *Mongoliya nakanune revolyutsii* (Moscow, 1959), and are taken here from a 2023 article on the fiscal and tax policy of the Bogd Khanate published in *Modern Diplomacy* and from Thomas E. Ewing's citation of Maiskii in "Ch'ing Policies in Outer Mongolia 1900–1911" (*Modern Asian Studies*). The reading of the separately-counted category as *shabi* is mine and is inferred from the arithmetic and from the parallel figures for the Great Shabi; it should be checked against Maiskii directly. The Great Shabi figures — some ten thousand families, approaching a hundred thousand people, over a hundred monasteries and over twenty thousand lamas, with 213,000 lan collected annually between 1912 and 1920 — come from a Mongolian archival paper on the Jebtsundamba's treasuries consulted through its published abstract.

Contested figures, given as ranges with their provenance. Livestock: 9.6 million head in 1918 and 13.8 million in 1924, with herder ownership put at anywhere between fifty and eighty per cent of the total and monastic and aristocratic ownership at the balance — a spread that wide is a confession that nobody knows, and it comes from the Library of Congress country study and its derivatives. Lamas: the figure of 110,000 in about 700 monasteries around 1921 is standard in the general literature; 583 monasteries and temple complexes is the figure usually given for the turn of the century; the claim that about a third of adult males were monks is consistent with the 1918 sex ratio but very probably counts novices, children, and non-resident lamas, and the range offered by the scholarly literature for Inner Mongolia is thirty to sixty-five per cent of males, which indicates how unstable the category is. Debt: nine million taels for the four aimags excluding the Jebtsundamba's ministry, per a 1921 Mongolian government estimate cited by Ewing from Natsagdorj, against thirty million taels by the mid-1920s in Onon and Pritchatt, reckoned at half the value of the country's livestock; a period Russian estimate held private debts to exceed official

ones by two or three times. These are not reconcilable and are not reconciled here.

Paraphrased modern scholarship, credited. Johan Elverskog, *Our Great Qing: The Mongols, Buddhism and the State in Late Imperial China* (2006), for the argument against reading Qing patronage of Buddhism as simple instrumental control — characterised here from reviews and publisher descriptions rather than from the book, which is a real limitation, since the discipline this landscape holds rests partly on his finding. C. R. Bawden's *The Modern History of Mongolia* (1968) remains the standard English narrative and is named rather than used directly. Thomas E. Ewing on late Qing policy in Outer Mongolia, cited from the abstract and footnotes of the *Modern Asian Studies* article.

Language position, declared at the outset as this study will maintain throughout. The record here is in Mongolian, Manchu, Chinese, Russian and Tibetan. What I can reach is English-language scholarship, translation, and reference material. Every quotation above that I have seen only in a modern scholar's rendering is marked as such. The Qing legal codes exist in edited online editions in Chinese and Mongolian which I have identified but not read. Kaplonski, Baabar, Rossabi, Radchenko and Bawden are the names this study will need, and what they actually argue should be verified against them rather than against summaries of them, including the summaries in this paragraph.

Finally: three interested traditions bear on almost every figure above. The Soviet-era account had a position on pre-revolutionary Mongolia and wrote it into the sources; post-1990 Mongolian historiography has positions of its own and they differ among themselves; and the proposition that alignment with the north was the price of not being absorbed by the south is held sincerely in Mongolia, is not obviously wrong, and shapes a great deal of what is written. Where those readings bear on the argument they are reported as each side states them and are not adjudicated.

Part of the collection Patterns of Power. *Tested, never revealed.*

Module One

EVERYTHING EXCEPT RELIGION

Module 1 · The Floor of Force — a conquest carried out by four hundred horsemen against a state that produced almost nobody willing to die for it, promising in writing within seventy-two hours that one thing would not be touched; and the second and far larger floor laid sixteen years later against precisely that thing, by a commission constituted in Moscow, staffed by Mongolians, working to arrest quotas that were sometimes filled by taking whoever was to hand

A case study in the Patterns of Power series · Thomas J. Bryan with Claude (Anthropic) · held as tested, not revealed

Four hundred men

The military history of the Mongolian revolution can be given in a paragraph, and the brevity is the first finding.

On 18 March 1921 a partisan force of four hundred Mongols under Damdin Sükhbaatar took the Chinese trading settlement at Kyakhta Maimaicheng on the northern border. Through the spring the force was doubled to eight hundred while Soviet and Far Eastern Republican units were moved up behind it, and in April the provisional government — which at that point administered a border town and its immediate hinterland — decreed the conscription of every male over nineteen in the territory it held. In early June Baron Ungern-Sternberg's Asiatic Cavalry Division, which had taken Urga in February and restored the Bogd Khan to a throne it controlled, attacked Kyakhta and was thrown back by a Red Army force several times its size. On 28 June the main Soviet expeditionary corps crossed the frontier — the orders of battle give it at something over seven thousand infantry

and two and a half thousand cavalry against Ungern's three to four thousand sabres — and on 6 July the first Mongolian and Russian units entered Urga. Ungern was taken by a Red Army detachment in August and shot in Novonikolaevsk that September. The standard casualty figure for the whole business, including the preceding Chinese occupation, is about a thousand dead.

A thousand dead in a country of some 540,000 people. Set against the founding violence of nearly every other conquest in this collection that is a rounding error, and the reason is not that the Mongols were unwarlike. It is that by the summer of 1921 there was nothing left standing to fight. The Bogd Khan's autonomy had been signed away under duress in November 1919 by ministers acting without their sovereign's signature; the Chinese garrison that replaced it had been driven out not by Mongols but by a Baltic German mystic with a private army; and the throne the revolutionaries found in Urga in July was occupied by a blind and dying theocrat who had been under house arrest, then under Ungern's protection, and who had twice counselled patience when his own parliamentarians came to him for authority to fight.

So the founding act here is not a battle. It is the occupation of a vacancy — and the framework's usual first question, who was disarmed and how, returns almost nothing, because the disarming had been done by others across the preceding eighteen months.

The clause

What the new government did in its first week is more revealing than what it did in the field.

On 9 July 1921, three days after the columns entered the capital and two days before the ceremonial installation, the revolutionaries sent a letter to the Bogd Khan's court announcing that power now lay with the people. The letter attributes the country's disorder both to the failings of the hereditary leaders and

to laws that no longer answer to the age — and then, in the sentence that this study will keep returning to, it makes an exception. Everything, in the English rendering that has come down through the Soviet-era Mongolian literature, "except religion, will be subject to gradual change."

Two days later the Jebtsundamba Khutuktu was ceremonially installed on the throne of Mongolia as a limited monarch, and the country's first revolutionary government took office under a prime minister, Dogsomyn Bodoo, who was himself a lama. The party's earliest oath of loyalty had included the defence of the faith. When the Bogd Khan died in May 1924 the party did not simply forbid the search for his ninth incarnation; it reached for existing prophecies to argue that no further incarnation was to be expected — which is to say that it took the trouble to make the case in the idiom of the thing it was disposing of, rather than issue a prohibition it was perfectly able to issue.

That trouble is the evidence. Force never pays for what it does not need, and a government holding the capital with a Soviet expeditionary corps at its back had no structural requirement to leave a theocrat on a throne, retain a lama as premier, or argue theology about a reincarnation. It did all three. The expenditure tells you what the new holders of the floor believed they could not yet afford to touch.

The other side of the same fact is in the propaganda war of the spring. While the party was saturating the northern border with leaflets calling on people to take up arms against the White Guards, the Bogd Khan's still-legal government was flooding the same districts with warnings that these revolutionaries meant to destroy the Mongolian state and shatter the foundations of the Buddhist faith. Set the two documents side by side and the arithmetic runs itself: one party made a written exception for religion, the other predicted its destruction, and both statements are from 1921.

The floor that was not needed, and the one that was

For the first eight years the order held the country on a floor that scarcely had to be used against the population. Its violence in that period ran inward, at itself. Bodoo, the lama prime minister, was accused of counter-revolutionary conspiracy and executed with Chagdarjav and others on 31 August 1922; the man who had orchestrated his fall, Soliin Danzan, was arrested and shot during the Third Party Congress in August 1924 for representing bourgeois interests. The founding generation began eating itself within fourteen months of taking the capital, and it did so without any of it touching a herdsman.

What changed the picture was the leftward turn of roughly 1929 to 1932: the confiscation of the great estates, the banning of private trade, the first forced collectivisation of a nomadic herding economy, and the first sustained assault on the monasteries. Herds were driven into collectives that could not manage them and the state trading organs could not replace the private networks they had abolished; the loss is usually given as around seven million head, about a third of the 1929 total. Then, in the spring of 1932, the country rose.

The rising began on 10 or 11 April at the Khyalganat monastery in Rashaant, Khövsgöl, and spread through the neighbouring monasteries and westward. An extraordinary commission under Jambyn Lkhümbe was formed within days; his troops burned Rashaant, destroyed Khyalganat, and shot fifty-four of the two hundred and four insurgents they had captured. Through June and July, over some fifteen engagements, 614 rebels were killed and 1,500 arrested. The rebels carried flintlocks and a few old rifles; the government forces, though far fewer, had machine guns, mountain artillery, armoured cars, tanks and aircraft supplied by the Soviet Union, and Soviet advisers were present in the fighting. The uprising resumed in August and was not finished until November, having covered some-

thing like a hundred and fifty thousand square kilometres. The figures are fragmentary and should be handled as such; the totals usually given run above fifteen hundred killed. What is not fragmentary is who rose. Most of the rebels were ordinary herdsmen, and in Övörkhangai the Mongolian accounts record that the overwhelming majority of local party and youth-league members went over to them, as did nearly all the collectives.

Hold the two events next to each other. In 1921 a foreign-assisted force of four hundred, rising to eight hundred, took the country against a state that produced almost no one willing to fight for it. In 1932 the same order, now with tanks and aircraft, had to fight a seven-month war against its own herdsmen and a substantial part of its own party. Nothing had happened in between to make the population braver. What had happened was that the exception of July 1921 had been withdrawn.

Moscow's answer to the 1932 rising was to rebuke the Mongolian leadership for excessive haste. The New Turn Policy dissolved the collectives, returned the animals, permitted secularised lamas to go back to their monasteries and restored electoral rights to some categories of them. The number of lamas, which had risen between 1924 and 1927, rose again. The retreat was real and it worked, which tells you the state understood exactly what it had struck.

Everything short of force, for sixteen years

Before the shooting there was a decade and a half of instruments that were not shooting, and any account that goes straight from the revolution to 1937 has removed the part that explains the rest.

The state taxed the monasteries punitively. It forbade minors to be ordained. It offered the poorer lamas secular employment and secular education. It published books, journals and posters attacking the wealth of the high lamas — attacking, note, their class position rather than their faith. A law of 1934 did not ban

religion but disestablished it, prohibiting religious practice in official contexts. Christopher Kaplonski's reading of this sequence is that these were political strategies rather than expressions of doctrinal atheism, and that the state turned to killing only after the cheaper technologies had been tried and had failed; his sharper formulation is that the resort to violence measures a state's vulnerability rather than its strength. That is a scholar working from Mongolian newspaper files and archives arriving, by his own route, at something this collection has found elsewhere — that visible force is the tell of a belief that never took — and it is worth recording that the convergence was not arranged.

The reason the cheaper instruments failed is in a remark Stalin made to the Mongolian prime minister Peljidiin Genden in 1934, preserved in the published Soviet documents on Mongolia and quoted by Kaplonski: that there appeared to be a state inside Genden's state, one government being Genden's and the other the lamas', and that the lamas' government was the strong one. At the same meeting Genden observed that an arrested lama had had to be released after a year because of unrest among the people. A government that must release a prisoner because of what the countryside will do is a government whose cost column is not full.

Genden himself is the module's most useful single figure, because he demonstrates that the men running this order were not interchangeable. A committed communist who had been made prime minister with Stalin's backing in 1932, he was also a practising Buddhist who is recorded as saying that the earth had produced two great geniuses, Buddha and Lenin; in 1933 he stated his intention not to fight against religion. He delayed the 1934 understanding under which the USSR undertook to protect Mongolia and the 1936 treaty that let Soviet troops be stationed there; he balked at converting the internal affairs committee — a quarter of whose staff were already NKVD officers — into a full ministry; and, according to the Mongolian accounts, he re-

fused a demand to liquidate the country's lamas. He was removed in March 1936, sent to a Black Sea sanatorium, arrested, and shot in Moscow on 26 November 1937.

The demand he is said to have refused is usually given as the extermination of more than a hundred thousand lamas, whom Stalin is quoted as calling the enemies within. This figure is now everywhere in the literature, but its provenance runs through the Mongolian post-1990 accounts, principally Baabar's, rather than through a document anyone has published; it has also acquired a piece of obvious folklore in the story that Genden struck Stalin in the face. The refusal is well attested and the number is not, and this study treats the number as reported rather than established. It matters less than it looks, because the number that can be documented is worse.

The second floor

The sequence from August 1937 is short, dated, and almost entirely traceable, which makes it the cleanest instance in this collection of a floor being laid on paper before it is laid on the ground.

On 22 August 1937 Marshal Gelegdorjiin Demid, the thirty-six-year-old commander of the Mongolian army, died on a train to Moscow of what was recorded as food poisoning. Choibalsan took his offices, so that one man now held the interior ministry and the army together. The day after Demid's burial, on 3 September, Choibalsan issued Order 366, declaring that many in Mongolia had fallen under the influence of Japanese spies and provocateurs. That same month Stalin ordered thirty thousand Red Army troops into the country and sent a delegation under Mikhail Frinovsky, deputy commissar of the NKVD and one of the organisers of the Soviet terror. Frinovsky handed Choibalsan a list of a hundred and fifteen names. On 10 September some sixty-five senior officials and intellectuals were arrested at night, in secret; the arrests were never publicly acknowledged, and the

men carrying them out had not been told what was coming until the night itself.

Then, on 19 September 1937, the Politburo of the All-Union Communist Party in Moscow approved Frinovsky's request to constitute special troikas — in the resolution's own words, "to examine the cases of Mongolian lamas." The body it authorised was the Extraordinary Plenipotentiary Commission: three men, Choibalsan for defence, Dorjjavyn Luvsansharav for the party, and Tserendorj as justice minister. The top-secret resolution creating it named the Yonzon Khamba of Gandan, his deputy Damdin, the dead Marshal Demid and the imprisoned Genden as counter-revolutionaries before any of them had been tried.

The trial opened at noon on 4 October in Ulaanbaatar's Central Theatre, a round building that also served as the parliament, with 1,323 people crammed into a hall built for 1,200 and loudspeakers relaying the proceedings to the crowd outside. Twenty-three were tried; four received prison terms and nineteen were shot; none was acquitted. The newspaper *Ünen* had begun publishing summaries of the conspiracy before the trial began, so that anyone who wished could arrive already knowing the plot. In its issue of 6 October the paper reported that over seven hundred party and youth-league members, more than two thousand two hundred ordinary herdsmen and more than two hundred lamas had written in about the case; of the ten letters it printed, six were from lamas, and almost all called for the accused to be punished by the law's highest measure.

The executions that followed the publicity were not public. Those sentenced later that October were shot at night in a valley outside the capital, by the headlights of cars and lorries. The site has no road to it.

Did the number precede the names?

The question this study puts to every Soviet acquisition is whether the violence was a response to conduct or an applica-

tion to a category, and here it can be answered from three directions.

The instrument itself was categorical. What the Moscow Politburo authorised was not a court to try named men but a troika to examine the cases of a class of persons defined by their vocation. The commission then worked from arrest lists produced by the NKVD delegation rather than from investigations arising in Mongolia, and Choibalsan added names to those lists to settle private scores — which is possible only where the list, not the offence, is the operative document.

The operational evidence points the same way. Kaplonski, working from Mongolian accounts, records herders arrested and shot simply because someone else had escaped custody and the security men were short of their quota of arrests. A quota that can be filled by a substitute is not a response to anything a particular person did.

And the arithmetic was stated openly at the top. In January 1938 Choibalsan told a party meeting that of some 350,000 males in Mongolia over eighty thousand were lamas, and called them parasites. That is the target defined as a population with a size. Against it, set what the commission's own paperwork produced: of the roughly twenty-six thousand persons it prosecuted, on the count of the Mongolian archivist D. Ölziibaatar, exactly seven were found innocent.

There is one complication that must be held rather than resolved, and the honest scholarship insists on it. Unlike the Soviet show trials, where the wrecking was generally invented outright, the Mongolian proceedings took place against a background of real opposition. High lamas genuinely did oppose the socialist government; the Panchen Lama was anti-communist and in contact with the Japanese; an arson attack on the Altanbulag factory complex in 1935 actually happened; Japan had taken Manchuria and would fight the Red Army and the Mongolian army at Khalkhyn Gol in the summer of 1939. When the Mongolian Supreme Court rehabilitated the Yonzon Khamba and

his co-defendants in July 1990, it did so on the ground that the case had not been proved, noting that a plot probably did exist but that no evidence showed who was in it. That is a more uncomfortable finding than outright fabrication would have been, and it should be left uncomfortable.

The count, in ranges

Every figure in this section is contested, and in Mongolia the contest is political.

The Extraordinary Plenipotentiary Commission's own records are the base: 25,588 persons condemned, of whom 20,099 were sentenced to death and executed. The historian Genden Tserendulam, daughter of the executed prime minister, compiled 28,185 names of persons killed between 1937 and 1939, of whom some 17,000 were clergy. The range usually given in the English-language reference literature is 20,000 to 35,000 dead, or three to five per cent of the population. A Mongolian symposium in 2007 offered 36,000 as a working figure and noted it was not definitive; Kaplonski uses "upward of 36,000." D. Dashdavaa puts arrests in the two years after the show trial at almost 57,000 and holds that three of every four arrested were shot, which would give something close to 43,000, and claims that one adult male in eight was killed, which sets a rough ceiling near 45,000. The head of Mongolia's presidential commission on the repressions has put the total at 100,000. These are not reconcilable and are not reconciled here; what can be said is that the documented floor is above twenty thousand and the plausible ceiling is above forty, in a country of perhaps three-quarters of a million people.

On the clergy specifically: something between seventeen and eighteen thousand lamas condemned to death, more than seven hundred monasteries destroyed — one Mongolian count gives 746 liquidated — and thousands more monks forcibly laicised or conscripted. Kaplonski's arithmetic on the destruction is worth

stating plainly: close to forty monasteries a month, for eighteen months, in a country with under a million people and a correspondingly small army.

On the elite: twenty-five persons from the top positions in party and government, including two former prime ministers; 187 from the military leadership; thirty-six of the fifty-one members of the party's own central committee. Of the seven men who had founded the Mongolian People's Party in a Urga courtyard in June 1920, one had died in 1923, two had been shot in the twenties, two more were destroyed in these years — Dogsom executed in 1941, Losol dead in a Soviet prison before trial — and one, Choibalsan, was running the commission.

Mass graves of executed monks were found near Mörön in Khövsgöl in 1991 and at Khambyn Ovoo in Ulaanbaatar in 2003. The remains at the second site were all killed by a single shot to the base of the skull.

Whose floor

The seed for this study asked the question the case makes newly available: when the men pulling the triggers are the conquered's own government, whose floor is it?

The record here permits an unusually exact answer, because the two halves of the act were performed in different capitals and both left paper. The category was authored in Moscow: a Politburo resolution constituting the tribunal, an NKVD deputy commissar supplying the arrest lists, thirty thousand Red Army troops arriving in the same month, Soviet advisers refining the interrogations, and the prisoners of highest rank — Genden, and later the prime minister Anandyn Amar — removed to the USSR to be tried by Soviet troikas and shot there. The execution was Mongolian: a Mongolian commission, Mongolian interior troops, Mongolian interrogators, a Mongolian newspaper printing the confessions in Mongolian, and Mongolian letters calling for the highest measure. Choibalsan was present at some interroga-

tions, sometimes recommended leniency, and was sometimes overruled by NKVD officers when he did.

Both halves are true and neither can absorb the other. A Mongolian public that has spent thirty years re-examining this period has largely settled on assigning the guilt to the Soviet Union and the NKVD and reading Choibalsan as a man with the choice of obeying or joining Genden and Amar; scholars have noted, carefully, that this reading also spares everyone else. The framework has no instrument for adjudicating that, and should not pretend to one. What it can do is record precisely which operations were performed by whom, and note that a floor whose category is written in one country and whose trigger is pulled in another is a genuinely different object from the ones this collection has so far described — and that the difference is invisible to a casualty count, which registers only the second half.

Reading the floor against the framework

The framework treats the floor of force as an act performed at a founding, after which belief is laid over it and force withdraws to the margins as the years pass and formation does its work. This case has two floors sixteen years apart, and the second is between twenty and forty times the size of the first. That inversion is the module's finding, and the explanation is not that the conquest was incomplete.

The size of a floor is set by which layer of the conquered order it is aimed at, and the layers are not equally expensive. Taking the apex of a naturalised order is cheap — often astonishingly cheap, and cheapest of all when a prior conqueror has already hollowed the apex out. Four hundred horsemen and a borrowed expeditionary corps took Mongolia in 1921 at the cost of about a thousand lives, because what they were taking was a government, and the population had no particular attachment to that government as a government. Taking the *formation* is the expensive operation, because the formation is what the

population actually holds, and it is held by every household rather than concentrated in a capital that can be occupied. The order discovered this twice: in 1932, when it withdrew the exception of 1921 and had to fight a seven-month war against its own herders and a large part of its own party; and from 1937, when it returned to the same object with an apparatus adequate to the task and destroyed it.

Three consequences follow for the framework's expectations.

First, a conqueror can complete a conquest and leave the actual load-bearing structure of the conquered order entirely untouched, and will not necessarily know it. The exception in the letter of 9 July 1921 was not a concession wrung out of the new government; it was written by men who had just won, at a moment when they could have written anything, and it was written because they could see what they were not yet strong enough to take. That is a founding conqueror correctly reading his own position and saying so on paper. The document is therefore not evidence of moderation but of an accurate survey.

Second, the framework should expect the expensive floor to arrive late rather than early wherever the conquered order's belief is lodged in an institution rather than in a throne. The usual sequence — maximum force at the founding, declining thereafter — describes a conqueror taking an order whose belief and whose government are the same object. Where a prior conquest has separated them, as the Qing decree of 1758 had separated Mongolia's supreme religious office from its dynastic line, a newcomer can have the government for almost nothing and will meet the real cost only when he moves against the church. The curve of force over time is then U-shaped, and a study that samples it only at the founding will describe one of the most violent orders in this collection as one of the gentlest.

Third, and this is offered as an instrument rather than a finding, this case separates the authorship of a category from its execution more cleanly than any other in the corpus. Everywhere else the question of who held organised violence has one

answer. Here it has two, in two countries, documented on both sides, and the arithmetic of the second floor cannot be written without both. Whether that separation was load-bearing — whether an order that could not have carried out this violence with foreign hands was able to carry it out with domestic ones — is a question about the coordinating class rather than about the floor, and this study will put it there.

One further thing belongs in this module without being a second claim. The order that did all of this was, at the moment it did it, governing a country of perhaps 350,000 adult men in which fewer than nine people in a hundred over the age of eight could read, and in which the industrial proletariat in whose name the whole enterprise was conducted numbered 2,400 in 1936. The doctrine had specified a class. The country contained a town's worth of it.

A note on sources.

Quoted directly: the operative clause of the Mongolian revolutionary government's letter to the Bogd Khan's court of 9 July 1921 — that everything except religion would be subject to gradual change — which reaches English through Ts. Nasanbaljir's Russian-language study of the revolutionary measures of 1921–1924 (Moscow, 1960) and thence into the reference literature. It is therefore a translation of a translation of a document I have not seen, and the fuller sentence is given here in paraphrase for that reason; anyone building on the exact wording should go to the Mongolian. The resolution of the All-Union Politburo of 19 September 1937 approving special troikas to examine the cases of Mongolian lamas is quoted in the five words in which it appears in J. Arch Getty and Oleg Naumov, *The Road to Terror* (Yale, 1999), p. 481, cited here at one remove through Christopher Kaplonski.

Stalin's remark to Genden in 1934 about a second and stronger state inside his own is paraphrased from Kaplonski's

translation of the published Soviet documents on Mongolia (Damdinsüren, Shepelev and Batsaihan, eds., Ulaanbaatar, 2005, p. 102). Choibalsan's Order 366 of 3 September 1937 and his January 1938 arithmetic on the number of lamas among Mongolian males are given from the reference literature drawing on his own published *Reports and Speeches* (Ulaanbaatar, 1951); the word rendered "parasites" should be checked against the Mongolian before further weight is placed on it. Genden's saying about Buddha and Lenin, and his 1933 statement of intent not to fight religion, are reported in the reference literature and I have not traced either to a primary text.

The principal modern scholarship used here is Christopher Kaplonski, "Prelude to Violence: Show Trials and State Power in 1930s Mongolia," *American Ethnologist* 35:2 (2008), which I have read in full and which supplies the account of the October 1937 trial, the theatre and the loudspeakers, the *Ünen* letter counts, the night executions in the valley, the sequence of pre-1937 non-violent instruments, the quota-substitution detail, the 1990 rehabilitation reasoning, and the argument that violence indexed the state's weakness rather than its strength. Baabar's *Twentieth Century Mongolia* (1999) and C. R. Bawden's *The Modern History of Mongolia* are the standing narrative authorities behind most of the dates and figures in the reference literature; both are named here and neither has been read directly, which is a real limitation given how much of the chronology descends from them.

Contested figures, with their provenance. The Extraordinary Plenipotentiary Commission's own totals of 25,588 condemned and 20,099 executed are the base figure in the Mongolian rehabilitation-era literature. D. Ölziibaatar's finding that seven of roughly 26,000 prosecuted were acquitted, and that clergy were over half of those repressed between 1937 and 1947, is from his *Yagaad 1937 on?* (Ulaanbaatar, 2004), cited through Kaplonski. D. Dashdavaa's figures — almost 57,000 arrested, three in four shot — are from his 2004 study, cited through Kaplonski, who

notes that Dashdavaa gives no source for the proportion. The 20,000–35,000 range and the 3–5 per cent of population are the reference-literature standard, resting on Kuromiya and Atwood. Genden Tserendulam's 28,185 named dead was reported in the press in 2001. The presidential commission's 100,000 is reported in journalism and is at the extreme upper end. For 1921: the roughly one thousand dead, the four hundred and then eight hundred partisans, the 7,600 infantry and 2,500 cavalry of the Soviet corps and Ungern's 3,500 sabres are reference-literature figures descending from Soviet and Mongolian official histories, and should be read as orders of magnitude. For 1932: the 614 killed and 1,500 arrested in June–July, the 54 of 204 shot at Rashaant, the seven million head of livestock lost, and the claim that some ninety per cent of party members in Övörkhangai went over to the rebels all rest on Mongolian accounts of varying accessibility; the overall figure of more than fifteen hundred killed is the one usually given and the sources themselves describe the data as fragmentary.

Three interested traditions bear on every number above and are not adjudicated here: the Soviet-era account, which recorded the repressions as the elimination of counter-revolutionaries; the post-1990 Mongolian rehabilitation literature, which was produced by commissions with a purpose and is the source of most of the names; and the present Russian position on the period. Where they diverge, both readings are given as their holders state them. It should also be said that the archive is one-sided in a specific way: the case files remain in the closed holdings of the successor to the Ministry of Internal Affairs, relatives receive summaries rather than documents, and what is publicly readable is largely what the state chose to print at the time — which means that the fullest account available of what was done to these people is still, in large part, the account written by the people who did it.

Part of the collection Patterns of Power. *Tested, never revealed.*

Module Two

A LIST OF CONSCRIPTS

Module 2 · The Settlement — a conquest that found no land to divide and divided persons instead; a constitution translated in Moscow and produced from a prime minister's pocket, whose thirty-fifth article decided who was a person; the abolition of clan names in 1925 and the seventy years it took a country to forget who its ancestors were; and the single property grant this order ever made, whose consideration was leaving the monastery

A case study in the Patterns of Power series · Thomas J. Bryan with Claude (Anthropic) · held as tested, not revealed

What the instrument found

Every settlement in this collection so far has begun with the same operation: a conqueror finds wealth held in a form that cannot be transferred, converts it into a thing that can, and then grants it. Office-land becomes an estate; clan land becomes a parcel; collective patrimony becomes a partible share; and the occupied becomes the vacant. The conversion is the act and the transfer is only its consequence.

In Mongolia in 1921 there was nothing on which that operation could be performed, because the wealth was not in the ground.

Land was not owned by anyone, and the question of who owned it had never arisen, because a pastoral economy moving between seasonal pastures does not generate the question. What existed instead was a right of use running through the banner, and the banner was an administrative container for people. The wealth itself was livestock — 9.6 million head at the 1918 count — and livestock is already a thing. It is countable, movable, divisible and saleable; it needs no legislative conver-

sion; a herd of two thousand sheep can be taken from one man and given to another in an afternoon by anyone with enough armed men, and no statute is required to make the transfer intelligible.

So the technology this framework watches for — the fiction that turns a relation into a property — had nothing to do here at the level of goods. Which throws the whole question one level down, to where the Qing settlement had actually been made: in persons. A man's standing came from his banner, his rank and his descent, all three of them recorded, all three of them hereditary, and none of them alienable. Whether he was *taij* or *ard*, whether he owed his labour to a prince or to a monastery, whether he could move — these were entries in a register maintained by a state, and they were the only thing in the country that behaved like property in the framework's sense, because they were the only thing that determined what a person could do and could not be sold, given away, or escaped.

The settlement that follows is therefore made in exactly that currency, and it should be read as a competent conqueror doing the obvious thing rather than as ideology imposing a foreign template. What was there to divide was people, so people were divided.

The fiction

The instrument by which the new order justified taking what it took was not vacancy, recognition, or divisibility. It was liberation, and its grammar deserves attention, because a liberation is even harder to characterise as a taking than a recognition is: a recognition says *you already owned this*, while a liberation says *this was never anyone's to own, and we have ended the wrong.*

The measures of 1921 to 1925 are the fiction in its concrete form, and each of them was materially real. The debts owed to the Chinese trading houses — nine million taels on the Mongolian government's own 1921 estimate for the four aimags alone,

and perhaps thirty million by the mid-1920s on other counts — were cancelled. Personal bondage was abolished: the *khamjlaga*, serfs for life of the local nobility under Manchu law, and the *shabi*, the vassals of the monastic estates, ceased in law to be either. Hereditary titles, ranks and their attached privileges were abolished, and the general Magsarjav, one of the most respected soldiers in the country, was among the first to renounce his own. Land was declared national property.

Notice what that last item does. In a country where nobody owned land, a nationalisation transfers nothing from anybody. It is not a seizure; it is the creation of an owner where there had been none, and the owner it creates is the state. Nothing changed on the ground in 1924 and nothing needed to; the clause sat there until 1959, when it became the basis on which every pasture in Mongolia was administered by a cooperative, and it still sits there today, since the herds were privatised after 1990 and the pastures were not. **A statute that appears to take nothing is worth reading twice, because what it usually does is establish a title that will be needed thirty years later.**

The abolitions were real and they were also a settlement. A cancelled debt is a transfer from creditor to debtor. An abolished bondage is a transfer of a man’s labour from his lord to himself — and, as it turned out, to the state that had freed him. An abolished title is the removal of a claim. Each of these is an act of division performed in the vocabulary of undoing a division, and the men performing them were not being cynical: the debts really had ruined herders, the bondage really had been bondage, and the titles really had been Manchu grants. This is the difficulty the framework insists on holding. The fiction is not that the wrongs were invented. The fiction is that ending them was not itself a settlement.

Article Thirty-Five

The document that actually made the settlement was a constitution, and the circumstances of its drafting are a matter of record.

A drafting commission under the justice minister Magsarjav had been set up in mid-1922 and was disbanded later that year for taking what its critics called a wrong turn — it had tried to take European and international law into account. A second commission was constituted by government resolution in late October 1924 under the prime minister, Balingiin Tserendorj, and produced a finished draft almost immediately; the Mongolian accounts hold that Tserendorj took from his pocket a text that had already been prepared, in translation, by Turar Ryskulov of the Comintern and the Buryat Elbegdorj Rinchino, on instructions from Moscow. The commission worked to the model of the 1918 constitution of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic. The Great Khural adopted it unanimously on 26 November 1924, ten chapters and seventy-two articles.

The election that produced that Khural is worth recording, because it is the clearest single piece of evidence in this study about where the population's loyalties then lay. Ninety members were to be elected. The party and the Youth League instructed the aimag assemblies to vote for commoners. Several princes were elected anyway, including Dugarjav of Ikh Dulaan uul and Tseren-ochir of Tüsheet Khan. The princes were disqualified and the seats re-run, though six princes became members in the end; nine of the ninety were lamas and seven could not read. When the Khural met on 8 November only seventy-seven attended, and sixty-four of those were party or League members. Given a free choice at the first opportunity, a substantial part of the country voted for its nobles, and the result was annulled.

Then Article Thirty-Five decided who would be able to vote next time. In the English renderings that have come down, it denied the franchise to former title-holders, to clergy, and to

monks in permanent residence at monasteries; and, in its opening sections, to those pursuing profit and exploiting others, to those hiring and holding others in service, to those living on income from capital or similar sources, and to traders and moneylenders. The disqualified were placed in the same schedule as those judged mentally incapable — which is the 1918 Russian formula transplanted, and which does more work than a mere disqualification, because it puts a whole population into a legal category whose members are, by the document's own arrangement, not fully persons.

This is where the settlement's division actually happens. There is no register of new proprietors to examine, because nobody was made a proprietor. There is a register of who counts, and it was compiled by criteria the state wrote and the state applied.

The status worth having

What follows from a franchise article of that kind is a country in which a person's most valuable possession is his classification.

The category that mattered was *ard* — commoner, or, in the Mongolian formulation reported of the 1924 Khural, a person of poor descent. Mongolian accounts of that assembly record that the great majority of the delegates who took their seats were *ard*, and describe the classification as having become the most sought-after status in the country. That phrase should be taken literally rather than as a flourish. A classification that determines whether a man may vote, hold office, join the party, send his children to school, or be arrested is not a description of him; it is the whole of what he has, and unlike a herd it cannot be hidden, sold, or moved across a border.

And it has a property no herd has: it can be revised by an office, retroactively, and by descent. A man's classification depended not on what he did but on what his father and grandfather had been, which is why Mongolians of the socialist period

wrote three-generation biographies naming their parents and grandparents, and why concealing a repressed relative became one of the ordinary competences of citizenship. The framework's usual question — what does the ordinary subject still hold that the order has not taken — returns, here, an answer made of paper.

The names

The most consequential single act of this settlement was performed in 1925 and it took nothing that could be counted.

Traditionally a Mongolian was known by a clan name and a given name, and the clan names carried the descent on which the entire prior order had run: Borjigin, the clan of Chinggis, from which the hereditary nobility claimed its right to govern, and beneath it the tribal and lineage names that placed a man in the country. In 1925 the People's Revolutionary Party abolished clan names. Family records were confiscated, destroyed, lost or simply allowed to lapse. What remained was a single given name, to which people appended their father's name or its initial to tell one another apart.

Read that against what the Qing settlement had been. The Manchus had bound Mongolia by confirming ranks that ran by blood, by seating hereditary princes in eighty-six banners, and — as the previous conquest's sharpest move — by removing from the Khalkha the possibility that their supreme religious authority could ever again be a Chinggisid, since after 1758 every Jebtsundamba was found in Tibet. Descent was the medium in which the old order's claims were denominated. In 1925 the new order did not redistribute that medium. It abolished it.

The measure worked, and the evidence of how well it worked is the effort it took to undo. When Mongolia passed a law in 1997 requiring surnames, most families no longer knew what theirs had been. The linguist and library director Serjee, who wrote the handbook people used to choose, recovered his own —

Besud — by finding his grandfather's name on a list of army conscripts from 1925, which is to say from the same year and very nearly the same apparatus that had abolished it. Others chose the name of an ancestral mountain, river, village or trade. And a very large number, given a free choice for the first time in three generations, chose Borjigin, so that it is now overwhelmingly the commonest clan name in the country, followed at a great distance by everything else.

Set the two ends of that arithmetic next to each other and leave them there. In 1925 a state abolished the register of descent because descent was the currency the order it had overthrown ran on. In 1997 the register was reopened, and a country that had been formed for seventy years to hold its origins in a state-issued category reached back past both conquests and named itself after the man whose descendants both had been built to manage.

What was actually taken, and when

The property settlement proper did not begin until 1929, eight years after the conquest, and it was not completed until 1959 — thirty-eight years after it.

The first phase ran from 1929. Under Choibalsan's direction more than six hundred feudal estates, meaning herds and fixed property, were confiscated. In 1931 and 1932 the property of more than eight hundred religious and secular notables was seized and more than seven hundred heads of household were killed or imprisoned. Collectivisation followed expropriation, and by 1931 more than a third of stock-raising households had been forced into communes. What happened next has already been counted in the ledger of force: seven million animals died or were slaughtered, about a third of the 1929 herd; the state trading organs could not replace the private networks they had abolished; food shortages spread; and in April 1932 the country rose. By the autumn the Comintern had concluded that the re-

volution had been going too fast, the collectives were dissolved, the animals were returned, and the whole settlement was undone.

That reversal is the fact the framework should sit with longest. An order that has laid a floor, taken a capital and written a constitution does not usually give the property back. This one did, because it had discovered that it could not hold what it had taken.

The second phase began in the mid-1950s and used a different instrument. Herding cooperatives — *negdel* — replaced the earlier producers' associations in 1955, and by 1959 the government could declare collectivisation accomplished; the usual figure is that around ninety-nine per cent of herding households had joined by 1959 or 1960. The Mongolian statistics mark the shift precisely: in 1950 private owners held 98.3 per cent of the country's livestock, and by 1960 the cooperatives held 73.8 per cent, the state 2.7, and individual cooperative members 23.5. That last figure is the design. A member kept animals of his own, up to a ceiling that varied by ecological zone — ten head in the mountain steppe on one account, more elsewhere — and negdel members drew wages, holidays and pensions. The everyday decisions of herding, where to graze and when to move, largely stayed with the herdsman; what moved was marketing, the product target, and the ownership of the animal.

So the settlement here was made twice, by seizure and then by subscription, and only the second one held. The difference between them is not merely tactical. The first tried to take the herd; the second took the *disposal* of the herd's product and left the animal in the family's hands within a stated limit, which is close to the arrangement a shrewd extractor would design if he had learned that the previous method produced a seven-month war. Whether the ninety-nine per cent was voluntary in any sense a herdsman would recognise is a question this study will put where it belongs, alongside what was being

offered in the same decade — schools, clinics, wages, pensions — and what happened to those who declined.

The consideration

The framework's sharpest question about any settlement is what the grantee owed in return, because a grant purchasing armed service leaves a rival with a retinue while a grant purchasing compliance leaves a dependant with a title. Here the question has to be asked twice, because the order made grants at two different moments to two different kinds of person.

To the elite it granted nothing that could be held. There were no estates, no fiefs, no title deeds, and nothing heritable. What an official received was an appointment, a salary, a ration and later an apartment, a car and access — all of it attached to a post, all of it revocable by a decision taken elsewhere, and the consequences of revocation extending to his family. The framework's default question — if this arrangement collapsed tomorrow, would this man be better or worse off — has an unusually stark answer at every rung of that chain, because a man who holds a position and no property is not merely better off with the arrangement standing; he ceases to exist as anything if it falls. Whether that makes the default stronger or more brittle than a landed settlement is the question the module on elite coordination will have to run, and this module simply records that the property column is empty.

But the order did make one real property grant, and its consideration is the most diagnostic fact in the module. The herds and goods confiscated from the six hundred estates in 1929 were distributed — to poor laity, and to *monks who left their monasteries*.

That is a grant whose price is a change of formation. Not service, not tax collection, not political compliance, but apostasy: leave the institution that made you and you will be given animals. It is the cheapest possible way to attack a monastic estab-

lishment, because it pays for defections with property already taken from the establishment itself, and it recruits the departing monk into the settlement by giving him something he will lose if the old order returns. The instrument failed in 1932 along with everything else, and the number of lamas rose again under the New Turn. When the state came back to the problem in 1937 it had stopped offering to buy.

Reading the settlement against the framework

The framework's three settlement fictions — vacancy, recognition, divisibility — all do the same job in different registers: each converts something that cannot be transferred into something that can, so that land may be granted. To that list this collection has already added a fourth that concerns persons rather than land: where a doctrine requires classes the terrain does not contain, the classes are defined into existence and filled by procedure, and the resulting class fiction is a settlement instrument.

This case refines that fourth item in one specific way, and the refinement is the module's contribution.

Where the order being displaced had itself been settled in persons rather than in land, the incoming settlement's decisive act is not the creation of the new classification but the destruction of the old one — and the destruction has to be performed on whatever medium the old classification was recorded in. Here that medium was descent, so the operative instruments were an abolition of hereditary titles in 1925, an abolition of clan names in the same year, and the confiscation or loss of the family records in which descent was kept. A conqueror meeting a landed order dispossesses by statute and leaves the genealogies alone, because a genealogy is not a title to anything he wants. A conqueror meeting an order in which the genealogy *is* the title has to go after the

genealogy, and the tell that he is doing so is that he reaches for a naming law.

Three things follow, and the third is the one worth carrying forward.

First, this explains the sequence. The property settlement in Mongolia arrived eight years after the conquest, failed, was reversed, and was not completed until thirty-eight years after it. The classification settlement arrived within four years and was never reversed. That ordering looks strange only if one expects the settlement to be about goods. If the settlement is about who counts, then the constitution of 1924 and the naming law of 1925 *are* the settlement, and they were made at exactly the moment the framework would predict — immediately, while the floor was fresh — with the disposal of the animals left as a second and much harder problem for later.

Second, it explains the residual. Elsewhere in this collection a subject's last defence is something he holds: a plot, a trade, a legal disability he reads as a protection. Here it is an entry on a form, and an entry can be revised by an office, retroactively, and by descent. That makes it uniquely fragile. But the case adds a point the general observation misses: it is fragile *because* it replaced a genealogy, and a genealogy is the one form of standing a state cannot reissue. When Mongolia tried to give the names back in 1997 it found that it could restore the law but not the information, and the country had to reconstruct its own descent out of conscript rolls, local histories, ancestral villages, and guesswork. **A settlement made in categories can be reversed by repealing the categories. A settlement made by destroying a register cannot be reversed at all, because the register is gone.**

Third, and offered as an instrument for later modules rather than a finding: the only property this order ever put into private hands was paid out as the price of leaving a monastery. That single clause states the whole strategic problem of the next thirty years more compactly than any other document in the

case — that the thing the settlement most needed to buy was not obedience, and not revenue, but the transfer of a man's allegiance from an institution the state could not command.

A note on sources.

Quoted directly: the disqualifying clauses of Article Thirty-Five of the Constitution of the Mongolian People's Republic of 26 November 1924, in the English renderings that circulate in the Mongolian and Anglophone secondary literature — former titleholders, clergy, and monks in permanent residence at monasteries; and those pursuing profit and exploiting others, hiring and holding others in service, living on income from capital, and trading or lending money. The Mongolian original is on Wikisource and an English text of the whole constitution was printed in *British and Foreign State Papers* vol. 134 (HMSO, 1936); I have consulted neither, and anyone resting weight on the exact wording of the article should go to one of them. The characterisation of the disqualified as sharing a schedule with the mentally incapable is reported in the secondary literature and follows the 1918 Russian model, and should likewise be checked against the text.

The drafting history — the 1922 commission disbanded for consulting European law, the October 1924 commission under Tserendorj, the draft prepared in translation by Turar Ryskulov of the Comintern and Elbegdorj Rinchino, and the account of Tserendorj producing it from his pocket — comes from the Mongolian popular-historical literature descending from Baabar, which I have read only in English digest. It is a striking story and it should be verified before it is relied on; the underlying fact that the constitution was modelled on the RSFSR constitution of 1918 and that Ryskulov supervised the commission is separately attested.

The 1924 election — princes elected, disqualified and the seats re-run, six princes seated in the end, nine lamas, seven il-

literate members, seventy-seven of ninety attending, sixty-four of them party or League — is from the reference literature on that election and rests on Mongolian sources at one remove. The characterisation of *ard* as the most sought-after status, and the count of *ard* among the delegates, come from the same popular-historical strand and are reported here as reported.

The abolition of clan names in 1925, the confiscation and loss of family records, the 1997 surname law, Serjee's recovery of the name Besud from a 1925 conscript list, and the subsequent dominance of Borjigin among chosen surnames are drawn from press reporting of the surname restoration (the *Globe and Mail*, the *Seattle Times* and Associated Press coverage of 2000–2004) and from the reference literature on Mongolian naming. This material is journalistic rather than scholarly and would repay a proper source; the central facts are consistent across all of it.

Contested figures with provenance. The confiscation of more than six hundred estates in 1929, the seizure of the property of more than eight hundred notables in 1931–32, the more than seven hundred household heads killed or imprisoned, and the forced collectivisation of more than a third of stock-raising households by 1931 are from the Library of Congress country study of Mongolia (1989) and its derivatives, which descend in turn from Mongolian official histories. The seven million animals lost is the standard figure and is variously attributed to slaughter by herders in resistance and to mismanagement in the collectives; both are probably true and the split is not recoverable. The 1950 and 1960 livestock ownership percentages — 98.3 per cent private in 1950; 73.8 per cent cooperative, 23.5 per cent individual member and 2.7 per cent state in 1960 — are Mongolian government statistics reported in the same country study. The claim that ninety-nine or ninety-nine and a half per cent of herding households had joined a negdel by 1959 or 1960 is the official figure and the word "voluntarily" is the official word; it is reproduced here with that noted. The private-herd ceilings by ecological zone are described in the scholarly literat-

ure on socialist Mongolian herding and the specific numbers here are illustrative rather than exhaustive.

The 1921 debt figures repeat those set out in the landscape of this study: nine million taels for the four aimags excluding the Jebtsundamba's ministry, on the Mongolian interior ministry's own 1921 estimate as reported by Thomas E. Ewing from Natsagdorj, against thirty million taels by the mid-1920s in Onon and Pritchatt.

Two cautions. Almost every number in this module was produced by the state that made the settlement, and the categories in which they were produced — feudal estate, exploiter, *ard* — are the categories whose construction the module is examining, so the arithmetic and the fiction come from the same pen. And the Mongolian historiography of the 1920s has been rewritten twice, once under the order it describes and once against it; where the two diverge on the character of these measures, both readings are reported as their holders state them and neither is adjudicated here.

Module Three

THE STONE AT GURVAN NUUR

Module 3 · The Robe — an order whose legitimating claim was national liberation and was substantially true; which therefore had to keep buying the fact rather than merely asserting it, at a price that ran from a currency and an army to a horse-trade in the Security Council; and which found, in the summer of 1962, that the one thing its own claim could not survive was the name of the man who founded the nation

A case study in the Patterns of Power series · Thomas J. Bryan with Claude (Anthropic) · held as tested, not revealed

The inversion, stated at the top

The general expectation this collection carries into a colonial case is that the story justifying the conquest will be cut for the metropole rather than for the conquered — that the audience whose belief actually funds and mans the enterprise is the taxpayer and the conscript at home, and that toward the conquered the order will spend little or nothing, because a population held by force does not need to be persuaded.

That expectation fails here, completely and in the opposite direction, and the failure is the module's starting point rather than its conclusion.

What the order in Ulaanbaatar said about itself, from 1921 to 1990, was addressed to Mongolians. It said that Mongolia had been held for two centuries by a Manchu dynasty, that Chinese warlordism had extinguished the country's autonomy in 1919, that the Mongolian people had risen with fraternal assistance, and that what had been recovered was national independence.

The internal documents say the same thing as the external ones; there is no private vocabulary in which the enterprise is described as an acquisition, and the absence of such a vocabulary is itself a finding. And the claim was not merely broadcast. It was paid for, continuously, in a currency that costs more than any other an apex can spend.

What it bought, and what it cost

Force never pays for what it does not need. The sharpest instrument this framework owns is therefore the ledger of avoidable expenditure: what did an apex holding uncontested force spend on legitimacy it was under no compulsion to buy?

The answer here is sovereignty, and the bill runs for seventy years.

Mongolia was never annexed. It was never made a Soviet republic, never administered from Moscow in name, and no document exists that a later court could be shown. Instead it had a flag, a currency issued from 1925, an army with its own marshal, a foreign ministry, embassies, a constitution, and after 1961 a seat in the General Assembly of the United Nations. Every one of those is expensive. A republic inside a union costs nothing to run and can be reorganised by decree; a sovereign state must be defended in international law against a neighbour that denies its existence, which is a permanent diplomatic obligation with no expiry.

The Soviet Union carried that obligation. In August 1945, at the Yalta price for Soviet entry into the Pacific war, the Sino-Soviet treaty provided that Outer Mongolia’s status would be settled by a plebiscite. It was held on 20 October 1945 with a Chinese observer present, and the official return was 487,409 votes for independence, none against, from a register of 494,960 — a turnout above ninety-eight per cent and a unanimity of one hundred. On 5 January 1946 the Nationalist government in

Chongqing recognised the independence of Outer Mongolia, reciting the plebiscite in its communiqué.

That return repays a moment's attention, because it is the clearest small evidence in the module of what the robe actually demanded. There is very little doubt that a free vote would have gone overwhelmingly for independence: the Chinese occupation of 1919 was within living memory, and the alternative on the ballot was reabsorption. A government wanting the right answer did not need to arrange one. It arranged one anyway, to the last ballot. **An order that manufactures unanimity for a proposition that was already true has told you that what it required was not a majority but a total, and a total is not evidence — it is a liturgy.**

The seat took longer and cost more. Mongolia applied to the United Nations in June 1946 and was refused. The Republic of China, which held the Chinese seat on the Security Council, regarded Outer Mongolia as Chinese territory and used its veto against Mongolian admission in 1955 — the only occasion on which it ever used it. Nor was the opposition only Chinese: a White House assessment of 1 February 1961 concluded that on balance American interests were best served by "continuing our opposition to the admission of Outer Mongolia." Tsedenbal complained publicly that December that the aspirations of the Mongolian people had been ignored for many years.

The blockage was broken in October 1961 by a transaction. The Soviet delegate Valerian Zorin linked two admissions and announced that Moscow would block all further entrants unless Mongolia were admitted; Mauritania, wanted by twelve newly independent African states, was the hostage. The African group let it be known that if Mongolia were vetoed they would vote to seat the People's Republic of China in place of the Republic. Kennedy, Rusk and the ambassador in Taipei pressed Chiang Kai-shek to stand aside; he refused for months, wrote to de Gaulle for help, was refused there too, and finally gave way. On 25 October the Security Council recommended Mongolia by nine

votes to none with the United States abstaining and the Republic of China declining to vote at all, and recommended Mauritania immediately after. Both were admitted on 27 October 1961. The United Kingdom opened relations in 1963; the United States did not recognise Mongolia until 1987.

So the sovereignty that this order's whole legitimating claim rested on was, at the decisive moment, purchased in the Security Council against a West African state, over the objection of the government that claimed the territory and with the abstention of the government that would eventually become Mongolia's largest source of foreign investment. That is what the robe cost, and it is the strongest single piece of revealed-preference evidence in the case: an apex holding thirty thousand troops in the country, appointing its ministers and vetting its politburo spent fifteen years and a substantial piece of Security Council leverage to have a third party say that the country was independent.

The claim was substantially true

Here the module has to stop and say something the collection has not had to say before, because the instruments return it and there is no honest way around it.

The Manchu conquest of Khalkha was real; it began at Dolonnor in 1691 and it lasted two hundred and twenty years. The late-Qing New Policies, which proposed Chinese colonisation and the transformation of Mongol custom, were real, and they are why the princes and lamas broke away in 1911. The revocation of autonomy in November 1919 was real, extracted by a Chinese general who had arrived with troops and threatened the head of state with deportation, and signed by ministers rather than by the sovereign. The ceremony in December 1919 at which Mongols were required to prostrate themselves before a portrait of the President of China was real, and so was the crowd that came out that night and tore the Chinese flags off

the palace gate. The proposal in Xu Shuzheng's own plan of April 1919 to encourage Chinese settlement and intermarriage in order to transform the customs of the Mongols was written down by him and is in the record.

None of that is invention. When the order in Ulaanbaatar told Mongolians that they had been under foreign domination and had thrown it off, it was describing something that had happened. And the counterfactual is not comfortable either: what stood in the country in early 1921 was a White Russian cavalry commander killing Jews and Bolsheviks in the capital, a restored theocrat under his protection, an empty treasury and a debt of tens of millions of taels. The alternative on offer was not independence.

The framework has no worked case of a robe that is simply accurate, and the temptation is to treat accuracy as a defect in the analysis — to conclude that if the claim was true then it was not a robe. That is a mistake, and the reason it is a mistake is the whole of this module's contribution: **a claim's truth does not change what it is doing, it changes what it costs, and a true claim is the more expensive kind.** A false claim need only be asserted and defended against contradiction. A true one can be checked, and the audience will check it — which is why this order could not simply say that Mongolia was a nation but had to keep a currency in circulation, a marshal in uniform, an embassy in Delhi, and a seat in New York, in perpetuity, at real cost, against a neighbour that said otherwise. The performance was the claim. A robe of this kind does not sit on the order; it binds it.

The second audience, and what the doctrine did with the record

There was a second claim running at the same time, addressed elsewhere, and it did a different job.

Mongolia was the demonstration that a country could pass from feudalism to socialism without going through capitalism. That proposition had been stated to the first Mongolian delegation by Lenin himself in the Kremlin in November 1921 — that a non-capitalist path was possible and necessary, that the party's work would produce cooperatives and new forms of economy, and that a herding people would have to be developed a great deal before it could contain a proletariat at all — and it became, over the following half-century, the official periodisation of the country's own history. The standard party history published in Ulaanbaatar and translated for foreign readers divides the years exactly along that line: the deepening of the democratic revolution and the implementation of the goals of non-capitalist development from 1925 to 1932; the conclusion of the democratic revolution and a firm stand on the non-capitalist path from 1932 to 1940; the socialist stage from 1940.

Read those chapter headings against what this study has already counted. The years 1929 to 1932 are the confiscations, the forced collectivisation of a nomadic economy, the loss of seven million animals, the food shortages and the seven-month war against the country's own herders. The years 1932 to 1940 contain the destruction of more than seven hundred monasteries and the execution of something between twenty and forty thousand people, among them thirty-six of the fifty-one members of the party's own central committee. In the periodisation those are a deepening and a conclusion. **A doctrine that can convert a catastrophe into a stage has not concealed anything; it has provided a place to file it.** That is a more durable operation than concealment, because a concealed fact can be uncovered and a filed one is already public.

And the audience for that second claim was not principally Mongolian. It was the Soviet Union's account of itself and, later, the several dozen states across Africa and Asia to whom the non-capitalist path was offered as a template — the doctrine of socialist orientation, in which a country without a proletariat

could be led by a vanguard party through preparatory stages. Mongolia was the oldest working example, and an example is a thing that must not be seen to fail.

What it made unsayable

A regime that has abolished colonialism cannot describe a periphery as a colony; a regime that has liberated a nation cannot describe its own dependence. The interesting question is what specific descriptions were closed off, and the answers here are unusually sharp because the claim was so precise.

The Soviet role could not be stated. What the record shows about 1937 — a Politburo resolution in Moscow constituting a Mongolian tribunal, an NKVD deputy commissar supplying the lists, thirty thousand Red Army troops arriving in the same month — was unavailable in Mongolia for fifty years, and public discussion of the repressions was discouraged or condemned throughout. The dead were not named, and Tsedenbal successfully obstructed the de-Stalinisation that in the Soviet Union itself opened part of the file. Mass graves of executed monks were found near Mörön in Khövsgöl in 1991 and at Khambyn Ovoo in Ulaanbaatar in 2003, which is to say the country learned where its dead were after the order that killed them had gone.

The country's own writing could not be defended. The vertical Mongolian script, eight centuries old and still in daily use across the border in Inner Mongolia, was designated obsolete and feudal; a Latin alphabet was decreed in 1930 and implemented from 1932; by the late 1930s continued advocacy of the old script was denounced as nationalism, in the same years and by the same apparatus that was shooting people for it. In February 1941 the Latin script was confirmed. Two months later it was abandoned and Cyrillic decreed in its place, and Cyrillic became fully official on the first day of 1946. An alphabet was changed twice in a decade and a half, and the second change aligned the country's

writing with the writing of the state that was paying for its independence.

And the nation could not have a founder.

The stone at Gurvan Nuur

Chinggis Khan's birth is conventionally dated to 1162, which put his eight-hundredth anniversary in 1962. The impulse to mark it came, characteristically, from across a border: Daramyn Tömör-Ochir, the party's secretary for ideology and a Moscow State University graduate, had been in China for medical treatment and returned with the news that the Chinese were preparing their own commemoration, and that they intended to present Chinggis as a figure of Chinese history.

In February 1962 the Politburo assigned him the task of organising the Mongolian celebrations. Commemorative postage stamps were printed. An academic conference was convened. On 31 May, the anniversary date, the party daily *Ünen* carried a broadly favourable front-page assessment. And near the presumed birthplace at Gurvan Nuur in Dadal sum, Khentii province, a stone monument some eleven metres high was raised, carrying a carved portrait of the khan and an inscription saying that he was born there in 1162.

Soviet historians, informed of the conference, were strongly critical, and the Soviet response hardened into a denunciation of Chinggis as a reactionary and destructive figure. The celebrations were cancelled. At a Politburo meeting on 10 September 1962 Tsedenbal — who had had reservations from the start — assigned the responsibility to Tömör-Ochir and removed him, for what the party recorded as tendencies toward idealising the role of Chinggis Khan and inflaming nationalist passions; among the specific charges was that in extolling Chinggis he had been ignoring the merits of Marshal Choibalsan. The stamps, already printed, ended up circulating in the capitalist world. Tömör-

Ochir was expelled from the leadership, sent into internal exile, and in October 1985 was killed with an axe.

Tsedenbal gave the order to destroy the monument at Gurvan Nuur. He gave it more than once. Local officials set the order aside and kept the matter quiet; projects were drawn up to alter the stone, and objections were raised that removing it would be technically dangerous, and each project was forgotten. Mongolian accounts of Tsedenbal's long rule note that this may have been the only order of his that was never carried out.

The stone is still there.

Set that beside the robe. The order's entire claim on Mongolians was that it had restored the nation. In 1962 the nation's founder was, for a season, permitted; then a foreign historiographical objection closed the subject, the man who had opened it was destroyed, and the prohibition held for a further twenty-eight years. When it lifted, the name — in the phrase of a Mongolian strategist looking back — exploded: onto the currency, onto the vodka, onto a forty-metre statue outside the capital, into the programme of every political party in the country, and into the surnames of a population that had been made to forget its clans and, given the register back, overwhelmingly wrote down Borjigin.

How the leg was acquired

The framework asks a narrow question of every order: how did it come by the position of trusted interpreter — did it forge a new authority, redirect one the people already trusted, or inherit the position by destroying the previous occupant and refilling the vacancy?

Here it is the third, unambiguously, and the case illustrates the standing warning that attaches to it. The previous occupant was the Buddhist establishment, and it was not merely a church: it held the schools, the calendar, the medicine, the law of everyday life and roughly a fifth of the country's wealth, and it had

the only literate class in the country. In 1921 the new order redirected rather than destroyed — it left the theocrat on his throne, made a lama prime minister, put an exception for religion in writing, and argued its case about the ninth incarnation in the idiom of prophecy rather than by decree. That was a redirection, and it lasted eight years. From 1929 it turned to destruction, and by 1939 the position was empty.

What the framework predicts about the third provenance is that razing an occupant usually razes the rival channels that used to crowd and check it, and that the heir therefore receives a monopoly where a competition stood. That is exactly what happened, and the size of the monopoly is measurable: by the 1960s the country had one party, one newspaper of record, one publishing apparatus, one academy, one university, no religious institution of any consequence, a closed frontier with China from 1960, and no foreign broadcasting anyone could receive. The seat that had been filled for three centuries by an establishment answering ultimately to Lhasa was now filled by an establishment answering ultimately to Moscow, and it was the only seat.

But note what the case adds to that expectation, because it is not simply a story of impoverishment. The order paid for its occupancy in a way the previous foreign power had not. Tsarist Russia had built almost nothing in the Mongolian language. This order built literacy from something like seventeen per cent in 1940 to the high seventies and beyond within a generation, a national university in 1942, an academy of sciences, a publishing industry, a codified literary standard, newspapers, a theatre, a film studio and a scientific establishment — all of it in Mongolian, none of it required by the floor, all of it a real expenditure and all of it addressed to the conquered. That is the robe’s price in the second currency, and any account that omits it is not an account.

Tested or revealed

The doctrine's relationship to its own possible error can be read off two episodes in this module, and they point the same way.

In 1932 the order reversed itself. The collectives were dissolved, the animals returned, the secularised lamas allowed back, and the leftists blamed. That looks like correction, and at the level of tactics it was: something had been tried, it had produced a war, and it was stopped. But look at what was revised. Not the proposition that the monastic establishment had to go, and not the proposition that a herding people was on a path from feudalism to socialism — only the speed. The failure was located in officials who had moved too fast, several of whom were expelled and later shot. The claim itself emerged intact and was applied again five years later with an apparatus adequate to it.

In 1962 the same grammar ran on a smaller object. A commemoration was authorised by the Politburo; a foreign objection revealed that it contradicted something; the contradiction was resolved by locating the error in a person, removing him, and striking the question from the agenda for a generation. Nothing about the doctrine was adjusted, because the doctrine was not what had been tested.

When a measurement comes back wrong, watch what is done to the people who took it. Tömör-Ochir had, in effect, taken a measurement: he had asked whether a state legitimated by national liberation could commemorate the founder of the nation, and the answer that came back was no. He was expelled, exiled, and eventually killed. The question was not asked again until 1990. That is the signature of a claim held as demonstrated rather than as a generalisation, and it is worth noting that it fired here on a matter of national commemoration rather than of economics or religion — which is to say that the mechanism is not confined to the parts of the doctrine one would expect.

Reading the robe against the framework

Two of this collection's standing expectations about legitimating claims come out of this case altered.

The first is the audience. The framework holds that a robe is cut for whoever's compliance the order actually needs, and lists the plausible audiences: the governed, a wider co-religionist world, a rival power whose recognition affects durability, and the apex's own coordinating class. This case requires a fifth, and it is structurally different from the others because its compliance is not needed at all. Mongolia's sovereignty had to be *witnessed*. Its function was not to secure the obedience of the Republic of China or the goodwill of the United States — neither was going to give either — but to make the claim checkable by anyone who cared to check, which required a body whose confirmation could not be produced from inside the arrangement. That is why a seat in a general assembly was worth fifteen years of campaigning and a Security Council horse-trade, and it is why the module's ledger of expenditure is dominated by an item that bought no compliance from anyone. **Where a legitimating claim is a claim about a fact rather than about a right, the apex will pay for a witness, and the witness's indifference is not a reason to stop paying — it is the reason the confirmation is worth having.**

The second, and the module's actual contribution, concerns truth.

The framework has always treated a robe as a story laid over a floor, and has been careful to say that the story is not therefore a lie — that a built thing which became real is genuinely real, and that the people formed by it are not dupes. But every worked case in the collection so far has involved a claim that was at least partly manufactured: a vacancy where there were people, a confirmation of possession that had never existed, a mandate from heaven. Here the claim was substantially

accurate, and the finding is that **accuracy makes a robe more binding rather than less.**

The mechanism is straightforward once stated. A manufactured claim is defended by controlling what can be said; it costs suppression, and suppression is cheap. An accurate claim is defended by continuing to make it true; it costs performance, and performance is expensive and never finishes. This order had to keep a country visibly independent for seventy years — a flag, a currency, an army, an embassy, a seat — because its whole standing with its own population rested on a proposition that the population could check against the world by simply looking. Nobody in Ulaanbaatar had to be persuaded that the Manchus had ruled Mongolia. That was the point. And it follows that the order was more constrained by its robe than a conqueror running a fiction would have been, because it could not stop paying without the claim becoming visibly false.

The cost side of that arrangement is the second half of the finding, and it is where the module's title sits. **A claim that is true licenses the audience to reason from it, and the audience will reason toward whatever the claim's own terms make salient.** Tell a people for forty years that their nationhood has been restored, and some of them will ask about the nation — its script, its script's history, its territory across the southern border, and the man who founded it. Every one of those questions was foreclosed, and each was foreclosed at a point that the robe itself had made prominent. The order's zone of the unsayable was therefore not located where a conqueror's usually is, out at the edges where the extraction happens, but at the exact centre of its own legitimating claim.

Which yields the working proposition this study will carry into the modules on information and on collapse: **the more accurate a legitimating claim, the more precisely one can predict what an order will have to suppress, because the prohibitions will cluster around the claim's strongest point rather than its weakest.** A stone eleven metres high at Gurvan

Nuur, ordered destroyed by a general secretary and never destroyed by anyone, is what that looks like on the ground.

A note on sources.

Quoted directly and briefly: the American position paper of 1 February 1961, that on balance the national interest lay in continuing opposition to Mongolian admission to the United Nations, and Tsedenbal's public complaint of 7 December 1961 that the aspirations of the Mongolian people had long been ignored — both taken at one remove from Bolor Lkhaajav's account in *The Diplomat* (2021) of Mongolia's sixty years in the UN, which cites the American record and the Mongolian speech. The White House document is a United States government paper and should be traceable in the Foreign Relations of the United States series; I have not consulted it directly. The charges against Tömör-Ochir — idealising Chinggis Khan, inflaming nationalist passions, and neglecting the merits of Marshal Choibalsan — are quoted at one remove from the reference literature and from Mongolian popular history respectively, and the Mongolian wording should be checked before any of them is relied on.

The 1945 referendum figures — 487,409 votes for independence, none recorded against, 494,960 registered, turnout of 98.47 per cent — are the official returns as reproduced in Nohlen and others' handbook of Asian elections. The Chinese communiqué of 5 January 1946 recognising the independence of Outer Mongolia, reciting the plebiscite and the presence of Vice-Minister Lei Fa-chang as observer, is in the Foreign Relations of the United States series for 1946 in the American chargé's telegram from China, which I have read. The judgement that the result would have gone for independence in a free vote, and that the regime falsified it anyway when it did not need to, follows Mongolian commentary on the seventieth anniversary and is a judgement rather than a documented finding.

The United Nations sequence — the 1946 application, the 1955 Chinese veto (the only one that government ever cast), the 1961 linkage of Mongolia to Mauritania by the Soviet delegate Zorin, the pressure applied to and by the Brazzaville group, Chiang Kai-shek's letter to de Gaulle, the American abstention, the Republic of China's decision not to vote, Security Council resolutions 166 and 167 of 25 October and the admissions of 27 October 1961 — is assembled from the United Nations' own records of those resolutions, contemporary reporting in *Time*, and the American diplomatic record; the vote counts are from the resolutions themselves.

The Chinggis Khan episode of 1962 is drawn from the reference literature on Mongolian history and from Mongolian popular-historical accounts: the February 1962 Politburo assignment, the printed stamps, the academic conference, the *Ünen* front-page assessment of 31 May 1962, the eleven-metre monument at Gurvan Nuur in Dadal sum, the Soviet historians' criticism and subsequent denunciation, the Politburo meeting of 10 September 1962, Tömör-Ochir's dismissal and internal exile, and his killing in October 1985. Jack Weatherford's account is the source most often quoted in English for the manner of his death. The story that Tsedenbal repeatedly ordered the monument destroyed and that local officials repeatedly failed to do it comes from the Mongolian popular-historical strand and I have not found it in a scholarly source; it is reported here as reported, and it is the kind of story that a national historiography has every reason to preserve whether or not it happened as told. That caution should be attached to it wherever it is used.

The script chronology — a Latin alphabet published in *Ünen* in February 1930 and adopted by decree of the Great Khural in October 1930, implemented from 1932, revised in 1939–40, confirmed in February 1941, reversed within two months, Cyrillic decreed on 25 March 1941 and fully official from the beginning of 1946 — is assembled from the scholarly literature on Mongolian writing and from reference sources that disagree on several

of the dates; where they disagree the range is given. Literacy of 17.3 per cent in 1940 and of roughly eighty per cent by mid-century is the standard figure and rests on Mongolian official statistics.

Paraphrased and credited: Lenin's advice to the Mongolian delegation of November 1921, characterised here rather than quoted, since the text was first published in 1934 in the minutes of the ninth MPRP congress from the recollections of two participants and is therefore a reconstruction at thirteen years' distance by the party it legitimates. The chapter divisions of the official party history of the Mongolian People's Republic are cited from the published English translation's table of contents. Christopher Kaplonski's work on the 1930s underlies the reading of the show trial and the state's weakness; Charles Bawden's *Modern History of Mongolia* and Robert Rupen's work stand behind most of the chronology in the reference literature and are named rather than used directly.

One caution larger than the others. This module has argued that a legitimating claim was substantially true, and that argument is more exposed than most in this study, because whether the alternative to Soviet alignment was Chinese absorption is a proposition held sincerely in Mongolia, disputed in China, and used politically in both places. It is reported here as this study finds it, with the evidence for it named, and a reader who weighs that evidence differently should say so rather than accept it on the strength of the arrangement in which it has been set out.

Module Four

TO OUT-BISMARCK BISMARCK

Module 4 · Formation — the doctrine on religion, set out exactly as its authors set it out, including the passage in which Engels calls the prohibition of religion a folly certain to revive the thing it attacks; the two registers of that doctrine and the category that decided which one applied; the largest formation any conqueror in this collection ever built for the conquered; the most complete destruction of an interpreter class any of them ever achieved; and the count taken fifty years later

A case study in the Patterns of Power series · Thomas J. Bryan with Claude (Anthropic) · held as tested, not revealed

The theory, as its authors wrote it

The men who took Urga in 1921 carried a theory of religion, and it is worth setting that theory out precisely, because almost everything written about what followed assumes a cruder version of it than the one they actually had.

The founding passage is Marx's, from the introduction to his critique of Hegel's philosophy of right, written in 1843 and published the following year. The famous half-sentence about opium is the end of a longer thought, and the longer thought is not contemptuous. Religion, Marx wrote, is the sigh of the oppressed creature — the heart of a heartless world, the soul of soulless conditions — and it is the opium of the people. It is at once an expression of real distress and a protest against real distress. The abolition of religion as illusory happiness is the demand for real happiness. On this account religion is not a fraud practised

on fools; it is a true report of an intolerable situation, delivered in an inverted form, and the way to end it is to end the situation.

Lenin took that up in May 1909 in an article on the attitude of the workers' party to religion, and what he does there is spend most of his length attacking the theory that the assault on Mongolian Buddhism would later be conducted under.

He calls the corner-stone of the Marxist outlook the dictum that religion is the opium of the people, and states without qualification that Marxism regards every religious organisation as an instrument of reaction defending exploitation. Then he asks why religion holds the peasantry and the backward workers, and gives the answer he means to demolish: *because of the ignorance of the people* — the reply, he says, of the bourgeois progressive and the bourgeois materialist, who concludes from it that spreading atheist views is the chief task. That reply, Lenin writes, is superficial; it is not materialist but idealist; it does not explain the roots deeply enough. The real root is social — "the socially downtrodden condition of the working masses and their apparently complete helplessness in face of the blind forces of capitalism." Fear made the gods, and the fear in question is fear of a force that cannot be foreseen. A man who does not grasp this, Lenin says, remains "an infant-school materialist."

Then comes the operative passage, and it is Engels that Lenin is quoting. In 1874 Engels had called a declaration of war on religion by exiled Communards a piece of stupidity, and had said that such a declaration was the best way to revive interest in religion and to prevent it from really dying out. In *Anti-Dühring* three years later he condemned Dühring's proposal that religion be prohibited in socialist society; to declare such a war, Engels wrote, was "to out-Bismarck Bismarck" — to repeat the folly of the *Kulturkampf*, which had only stimulated the militant clericalism of the Catholics and had given prominence to religious divisions rather than political ones. What the workers' party should do instead, Engels insisted, was work patiently at organising and educating, which would lead to the dying out of religion,

rather than throw itself into “the gamble of a political war on religion.”

That is the doctrine. Not a claim that priests are conjurers and their people are dupes — Lenin explicitly rejects that as infantile — but a claim that religion is a symptom of a removable material condition, together with an explicit strategic prohibition on attacking the symptom directly, on the express ground that attacking it will make it stronger.

Two registers, and the category that decided which applied

Set beside that the other document this study has already put in evidence: Lenin’s draft theses on the national and colonial questions, circulated on 5 June 1920, three weeks before the two underground circles in occupied Urga merged into a party. Point eleven, addressing countries in which feudal or patriarchal relations predominate, lists among the things that must be borne in mind “the need for a struggle against the clergy and other influential reactionary and medieval elements in backward countries.”

There is no contradiction inside the doctrine, because the two statements are about different objects. The 1909 argument is about the *belief* of a proletariat in an advanced capitalist country, and its counsel is patience. The 1920 clause is about the *institutional political power* of a clergy in a country that has not reached capitalism, and its counsel is struggle. A careful reader can hold both.

But a governing apparatus does not read carefully; it reads for authorisation. And the effect of the pair, in practice, was that everything turned on which category a territory was placed in — because the doctrine said one thing about the clergy of a developed country and the opposite about the clergy of a backward one, and the classification was made in Moscow, in writing, before anybody in Ulaanbaatar was consulted. Mongolia was

backward by definition; it had no proletariat to speak of and no capitalism to have a reflex against. The prohibition in the 1909 article therefore did not apply to it, and the licence in the 1920 theses did.

This is the point at which the doctrine's own internal caution stopped travelling. What arrived in Mongolia was the second register without the first.

What was built

Before the destruction, and continuously alongside and after it, this order did something that no other conqueror in this collection did on anything like the same scale: it built a formation for the conquered, in the conquered's own language, at very great expense, when nothing whatever compelled it to.

The scale is measurable because the starting point was so low. In 1937 something under nine per cent of the population over the age of eight could read — a little over fifteen per cent of men and just above one per cent of women. By 1940 overall literacy stood at about seventeen per cent. Within a generation it was in the high seventies and rising, and by the end of the socialist period Mongolia was, on its own and international figures, a nearly fully literate country. That transformation was carried out in Mongolian, through a state school system built from almost nothing, and it was accompanied by a national university in 1942, an academy of sciences, a publishing industry, a codified literary standard, newspapers, a theatre, a film studio, a medical system, pensions, and the end of the debt structure that had ruined herding households before 1921.

Two things follow and both matter.

The first is that this is the exact inverse of the colonial pattern this collection has documented elsewhere, where formation is withheld from the majority because forming them would mean admitting them, and the order stays expensive and brittle as a result. Here formation was maximised. The order wanted the

population educated, and it wanted them educated *into* it — literate in a script aligned with the metropole's, schooled in a history periodised by the doctrine, and equipped to run a modern state. It succeeded. The Mongolian professional class of 1990 — the doctors, engineers, teachers, agronomists and, not incidentally, the people who organised the democratic revolution — was entirely this order's product.

The second is that the expenditure has to be read as what it was. This was not a cynical veneer. Building literacy from seventeen per cent to eighty is a thirty-year programme requiring thousands of trained teachers and a budget, and no floor requires it. That an order spent it on a population it already controlled by force is evidence about what the men running it thought they were doing, and any account that treats the substitution as merely instrumental has to explain why an instrument that expensive was chosen when a cheap one was available.

What was destroyed

And in the middle of that programme, between 1937 and 1939, the same order destroyed the only educational, medical, legal and scholarly institution the country had ever possessed.

The arithmetic has already been laid out in this study: something between seven hundred and nine hundred monasteries razed, seventeen to eighteen thousand lamas condemned to death, thousands more forcibly laicised or conscripted, and the whole thing done at close to forty monasteries a month for eighteen months. What has not yet been said plainly is what those buildings contained. The monasteries were where a Mongolian learned to read; where medicine was practised; where astronomy, mathematics, painting, sculpture, printing and the whole literate tradition of the country were held; where disputes were settled. The texts went into fires. The bronzes went to the smelters. A country with one educated class destroyed it in a

year and a half and then spent the next thirty years constructing a replacement.

That sequence — annihilate the interpreter class, then build a new one from nothing at enormous cost — is the shape of the module. It is not withholding and it is not substitution alone. It is substitution *by way of* annihilation, and the two operations have to be counted separately because they produced opposite results.

The framing, and what it tells us

Here the record complicates the picture in a way that has to be reported rather than smoothed.

The Mongolian campaign against the monasteries was, for most of its duration, framed as class struggle and not as atheism. The state taxed the monastic estates punitively, forbade the ordination of minors, offered poorer lamas secular work and secular schooling, and published books, journals and posters attacking the *wealth* of the high lamas. Christopher Kaplonski, working from the Mongolian newspaper files, reads these as political strategies rather than expressions of doctrinal atheism; the 1934 law disestablished religion rather than banning it; Choibalsan's speech of January 1938 called the lamas parasites and gave their number as a proportion of the male population, which is the vocabulary of an exploiting class rather than of a false creed. The one property grant this order ever made, as this study has already recorded, was paid to monks who left their monasteries — a purchase of defection, not of disbelief.

Two readings of that are available and the evidence does not decide between them.

On one, the class framing was a device and the atheism was the substance. On the other — and this is the reading the doctrine itself supports — the framing was the substance: these were men who had been taught that religion is a reflex of material conditions and that a direct war on belief is folly, and who

therefore attacked what their theory identified as the *root*, which was an institution owning a fifth of the country's wealth and a third of its men, and expected the belief to follow the institution into the ground. On that reading the assault of 1937 is not a departure from the 1909 argument but a misapplication of it, made possible by a categorisation: Mongolia was backward, its clergy was a political power, so the clergy could be struck as a class without this counting as the war on religion that Engels had forbidden.

This study cannot see inside anyone's head and does not try. What it can do is note that Peljidiin Genden, the prime minister who resisted the demand, was a committed communist and a practising Buddhist who is recorded as saying the earth had produced two great geniuses, Buddha and Lenin — which suggests that at least one of these men did not experience the doctrine as requiring what he was being asked to do. He was removed in 1936 and shot in Moscow in 1937.

The measurement

A theory that says religion is a reflex of a removable condition makes a prediction. Mongolia is close to a clean test of it, and the test is unusually clean for a reason worth stating: this order did not merely remove the clergy. It also did, more thoroughly than most socialist states, the *other* thing the doctrine prescribed — it removed the material helplessness. The debts were gone. Literacy, medicine, pensions, wages, schooling and a guaranteed livelihood arrived. If religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, this creature had been substantially relieved.

The count comes in three parts.

During. Gandan monastery in Ulaanbaatar was closed in 1938 and reopened in January 1944 by Choibalsan, on Stalin's recommendation, as the country's only functioning monastery; by 1947 it had fifty-seven monks and was holding public services. It was a showcase, kept for foreign visitors, its rituals ab-

breviated, its lamas forbidden to perform anything outside its walls, and it received no state money — it was maintained by donations from believers. Meanwhile, outside it, defrocked lamas were called quietly into gers and private houses to perform rites and recite texts; statues, thangkas, ritual implements and books had been hidden at the time of the demolitions and were kept hidden; the household observances — the house-warming, the first haircut, the stones added at the *ovoo* — went on. The practice did not stop. It moved.

After. From the first demonstrations in December 1989, the protesters' demands included the freedom to practise religion and the rehabilitation of the surviving ex-lamas and the families of the executed. Within a few years more than two hundred monasteries had been restored or newly founded, funded largely by individual donors — in many districts by local collections. The objects hidden in 1938 came back out and were returned. And the revival was reconstructed, in the first instance, by the old ex-lamas who had survived, which is why it retained the specifically Mongolian recitations and rituals rather than becoming simply an import.

Now. The 2010 Mongolian census returned 53 per cent Buddhist and 38.6 per cent no religion; the 2020 census returned 51.7 per cent Buddhist, 40.6 per cent no religion, 2.5 per cent shamanist. The shamanic tradition — the religion that Buddhism itself had suppressed by edict in the sixteenth century, and that socialism had suppressed again as primitive — also came back, in the northern aimags, with ethnographers reporting the number of active practitioners in some Buryat communities doubling within a decade. A boy born in Tibet in 1933 had been secretly recognised as the ninth Jebtsundamba Khutuktu; his existence was made public only after 1990.

The prediction failed. Seventy years, the total destruction of the institution, the killing of the clergy, the delivery of literacy and medicine and material security, and half the country still says Buddhist.

Why it failed

The doctrine misidentified the root, and the way it misidentified it is precise enough to be stated.

Lenin located the root in helplessness before "the blind forces of capitalism" — a fear of a specific, historically produced, therefore abolishable force. Change the mode of production and the fear goes; the gods that fear made go with it. But in Mongolia the blind force was not capital. It was the sky. A *dzud* — a winter that kills the herd — is not produced by a mode of production and is not abolished by changing one; a herding family in 1975 faced the same unforeseeable catastrophe as a herding family in 1875, with better veterinary services and a collective behind it, but with the animals still dying in the snow. The condition Lenin named as the root of religion was, in this country, a permanent feature of the world.

That is the local reason. The general one is larger and this collection has argued it elsewhere. The dependence on trusted interpreters is not a symptom of misery. It is the underside of the ordinary human competence to know things — the thing that makes a person a knower in a world too large to check alone — and it cannot be subtracted, only redirected. An order that destroys the interpreter class it found does not create a population of independent verifiers. It creates a population whose deference now has one place to go.

And that is exactly what this order produced, measurably: one party, one newspaper of record, one publishing house, one academy, one university, one permitted monastery with fifty-seven monks and no permission to leave the compound, a closed southern frontier from 1960, and no foreign broadcasting anyone could hear. The seat was not emptied. It was monopolised.

What refilled it in the meantime is a matter of record too. There was a mausoleum on the main square of the capital holding Sükhbaatar and Choibalsan, on the model of the one in Red Square. There were children named Oktyabr and Leninbold.

There was a founder who could not be criticised, a doctrine that periodised time, a calendar of observances, and a class of authorised interpreters of a canonical text — which is a functional description and not a jibe, and it is offered without any claim about whether the canonical text was true.

The flag, and when it can be flown

This study was set the task of testing a finding reported from another Soviet case: that attacking a formation converts it into a national flag only where the formation was already the nation's own.

Mongolian Buddhism was unambiguously the nation's own — as the landscape of this study established, a former conquest that had fully taken, naturalised over three and a half centuries until it was simply what the world was. It was attacked, not by a foreign occupier, but by the nation's own government, in Mongolian, by Mongolian hands. And for fifty years it did not become a flag. There was no Buddhist resistance movement, no underground church functioning as a national institution, no samizdat liturgy circulating as protest. There was a defrocked lama reciting in somebody's ger, and a statue behind a wall.

Then, in December 1989, the demand for religious freedom appeared in the first breath of the democratic movement, and within fifteen years Buddhism was functioning in Mongolia as a marker of national identity at least as much as of personal belief.

So the finding is not refuted. It is delayed, and the delay identifies the missing variable. A formation becomes a flag when someone can carry it, and carrying requires a second authority — a channel, an institution, a printing press, a pulpit, a movement — that the order does not control. Where the order holds every channel, the formation does not stop existing and does not stop being the nation's own; it simply has nowhere to be flown, and it retreats into the household, which is the one place a state

cannot garrison. The conversion is not prevented. It is postponed until the monopoly cracks, and then it happens very fast, because the thing being converted was never destroyed.

Reading formation against the framework

The framework's standing expectation is that formation is where an order sets the benefit dial early — that a population taught from childhood to see the arrangement as reality is cheap to hold, and that a conqueror who withholds formation stays expensive. This case does not contradict that; it clarifies where formation actually lives.

A formation is not stored in its institution. That is the module's contribution, and the case makes it about as sharply as any case could.

The Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party achieved something close to the theoretical maximum against an interpreter class. It killed the clergy, razed the buildings, burned the texts, melted the images, ended the ordinations, forbade the reincarnation, and held the country under an information monopoly for a further half-century while it built a substitute formation of real quality in the same language. If destroying a formation were possible by destroying the institution that carries it, it would have been destroyed here.

It was not, and the reason is that the institution is a *transmission* mechanism rather than a *storage* medium. What was stored was in households — in a hidden statue, in an observance at a cairn, in who a family called when someone died, in a hundred small practices that require no building and no clergy and are invisible to a state that is looking at buildings and clergy. An apparatus can reach an institution in eighteen months. It cannot reach a hundred thousand gers in fifty years, because the unit of enforcement would have to be the family, and no state has ever had the officers for that.

Three consequences for how the collection reads other cases.

First, the diagnostic changes. Asking whether an order destroyed a rival formation is asking the wrong question, because the answer is nearly always yes at the institutional level and nearly always no at the household level. The question that discriminates is what the order did about *household practice* — whether it tried at all, what instrument it used, and what that instrument cost. This order barely tried, which is itself the finding: it went after the visible institution, which was legible and finite and could be counted in a report, and left the invisible practice alone because there was no way to write a plan against it.

Second, the substitution must be judged on its own terms rather than as a failure. The formation this order built was real, large, in the language of the conquered, and is the reason Mongolia entered the 1990s with a literate professional population. It did not displace what it was built to displace. Both statements are true and neither cancels the other, and an account that keeps only one of them is a brief rather than a finding.

Third, and this is the doctrinal point the module was set to track: the theory under which the destruction was carried out had, written into it by its own founders, an explicit prohibition on the act and a prediction of its failure. Engels said that a declaration of war on religion was the surest way to revive interest in it and prevent it from dying out. Lenin quoted him approvingly in 1909 and called the alternative view infantile. Thirty years later, in a country classified as backward and therefore governed by the other half of the same doctrine, the war was declared, and the prediction came true — with a fifty-year lag supplied by the information monopoly, and then all at once.

A governing theory does not fail only where it is wrong. It fails where it is right and its own caution has been filed under a category that does not apply. That is a different kind of failure from ignorance, and it is worth naming separately, because it is invisible to anyone who assumes the men in question had not read their own books. They had. The book contained the

warning. The warning had an address on it, and the address was not Mongolia.

A note on sources.

Quoted directly, from public-domain texts. Marx's characterisation of religion as the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world and the soul of soulless conditions, and as the opium of the people, is from the introduction to *A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right* (written 1843, published in the *Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher*, 1844), in the standard English translation. Lenin's phrases — that the deepest root of modern religion is the socially downtrodden condition of the masses and their apparent helplessness before the blind forces of capitalism; that fear made the gods; that a man who misses this remains an infant-school materialist — are from "The Attitude of the Workers' Party to Religion," *Proletary* No. 45, 13 May 1909, which I have read in full in the Progress Publishers English translation. Engels's phrases as Lenin reproduces them — that a proclaimed war on religion is a piece of stupidity and the best way to revive interest in it, and that to prohibit religion in socialist society is to out-Bismarck Bismarck — are quoted at one remove through that article, from Engels's 1874 commentary on the Blanquist manifesto and from *Anti-Dühring* (1877); a reader building on them should go to Engels directly, since Lenin is quoting for a purpose. Lenin's draft theses on the national and colonial questions of 5 June 1920, point eleven, are quoted in the landscape of this study from the same archive.

Lenin's letter to Molotov for the Politburo of 19 March 1922, urging that the confiscation of church valuables be pursued during the famine with maximum ruthlessness and that the more of the reactionary clergy shot on the occasion the better, is quoted here in a phrase, at one remove, from press reporting of the document; the full English text circulates online and in the scholarly literature on the seizure of church valuables, and I

have not read it in a critical edition. It is included because the divergence between the 1909 argument and the 1922 instruction is part of the record and omitting it would flatter the doctrine.

Modern scholarship, paraphrased and credited. Christopher Kaplonski, "Prelude to Violence" (*American Ethnologist*, 2008) and his *The Lama Question: Violence, Sovereignty, and Exception in Early Socialist Mongolia* (Hawai'i, 2014), for the sequence of pre-1937 instruments, the reading of the campaign as political strategy rather than doctrinal atheism, and the scale and pace of the monastery destruction; I have read the article and not the book, and the book is the authority on this module's subject, which is a real limitation. Caroline Humphrey and Hürelbaatar Ujeed, *A Monastery in Time* (Chicago, 2013), and Vesna Wallace's edited *Buddhism in Mongolian History, Culture and Society* (OUP, 2015), are the standing scholarly references for Mongolian Buddhist practice and are named rather than used directly.

The account of practice during the socialist period — Gandan reopened in January 1944 on Stalin's recommendation, fifty-seven monks by 1947, no state funding and maintenance by donation, lamas forbidden to officiate outside the compound, ex-lamas performing rites privately in homes and gers, objects and texts hidden at the demolitions and later returned — is drawn from the survey history of Mongolian Buddhism published by Study Buddhism and from French and Mongolian material on the post-socialist religious landscape. The frequently repeated story that Gandan was reopened because the American vice-president Henry Wallace asked to see a monastery is described even by those who repeat it as possibly apocryphal, and is not relied on here.

Contested figures. Literacy of 8.5 per cent of the over-eights in 1937 (15.5 per cent of men, 1.1 per cent of women) is from Kaplonski citing Mongolian sources; 17.3 per cent overall in 1940 and roughly eighty per cent by mid-century are the stand-

ard figures and rest on Mongolian official statistics, which had an interest in both the starting point and the finish. Monastery destruction is given variously as more than seven hundred, 746, and more than nine hundred; lamas condemned to death as seventeen to eighteen thousand; both ranges are reported here rather than resolved. The census returns of 2010 and 2020 are the Mongolian national statistics office's, and the category "no religion" in a country with this history is doing work that a census cannot show — it may register conviction, indifference, or the habit of a population that spent seventy years learning what to write on a form.

Two cautions. First, this module has argued that a doctrine contained a prohibition on the act carried out in its name. That argument depends on reading the 1909 article as applying to the case, and the counter-argument — that the article concerns proletarian belief under capitalism while the 1920 theses concern clerical power under feudalism, so no prohibition was breached — is available and is stated in the module rather than answered. A reader who takes the second view should say so. Second, the Mongolian and the post-Soviet Russian historiographies of the anti-religious campaign differ, and the Mongolian Buddhist revival has an interest of its own in how the socialist period is remembered; where the readings diverge, both are given as their holders state them.

Module Five

THE SAME WINTER, TWICE

Module 5 · The Cost Column — a country with no walls, no fences and eight thousand kilometres of frontier, whose people owned everything they had on the hoof and could have walked away in any direction; the two winters of comparable cold, twenty-three years apart, that killed a third of the national herd and then an eighth; and what a herdsman was actually pricing when he stayed

A case study in the Patterns of Power series · Thomas J. Bryan with Claude (Anthropic) · held as tested, not revealed

The country that should not have been holdable

Take the standard account of why populations become capturable and hold it against this terrain, because the mismatch is the whole problem the module has to solve.

The argument runs that coordination becomes domination most easily where the coordinated cannot leave — that states form where good land is hemmed by desert, mountain or sea and a population pressed against its limits cannot simply disperse when a strongman begins to organise it. Robert Carneiro's version is disputed and its author softened it, and this collection takes the prudent reading: circumscription is one strong route by which people become capturable, not a law. But the principle the disputes leave standing is the operative one. Where people can walk away, they do.

Mongolia is very close to the theoretical maximum of a place where people can walk away. One and a half million square kilometres. A population that never reached a million until the

1960s. No agriculture worth the name, therefore no plot to be tied to and no crop that has to be defended in one spot for a season. A form of wealth — the herd — that walks, so that a family's entire capital moves at its own pace and is not seized by seizing a place. A dwelling designed to be dismantled in an hour. Frontiers of thousands of kilometres, unfenced, across country the guards could not see. And a culture in which moving four times a year was not upheaval but the ordinary shape of life.

If the exit dial is what sets the floor beneath the man at the bottom, this dial should have been jammed at maximum. It was not. From 1959 something like ninety-nine per cent of herding households were inside cooperatives, and they mostly stayed there for thirty years without a rising, without mass flight, and without the frontier guards having very much to do.

The question the module has to answer is not why they obeyed. It is why they did not simply leave, in a country where leaving cost a morning's work.

What he valued

Nothing in the ledger can be read until one knows what the man keeping it counted as a gain, and the mistake available here is to run the peasant's column on a herdsman.

A peasant's world turns on land and harvest, and the catastrophes that shape his ledger are the ones that take his plot or his crop — enclosure, requisition, a bad summer. A Mongolian herdsman owned no land, wanted none, and could not have used one. What he had was animals; what he wanted was more animals and healthy ones; and what stood between him and destitution was not a landlord and not a harvest but a winter.

That distinction is not decorative. It changes the shape of the whole calculation, because the herdsman's catastrophic risk is *correlated and total*. A bad harvest reduces a peasant's yield. A *dzud* — a winter in which deep snow, ice or extreme cold puts the grass beyond reach — does not reduce a herd; it kills it, in a

season, across a whole district at once, and it takes the neighbours' herds with it, so that there is nobody left nearby with a surplus to lend. A family can be prosperous in October and have nothing alive in April. And it arrives without warning of a kind anybody could act on, once or twice a decade, forever.

So the herdsman's benefit column has a large entry that the peasant's does not: anything that reduces the chance of the winter that ends him. He would pay a great deal for that, and what he would pay it with is the only currency he has — a share of the herd and a degree of independence.

The same winter, twice

Mongolia supplies something the historical record rarely offers: nearly the same shock delivered twice to the same country under two different arrangements, with the arithmetic written down both times.

In the winter of 1944–45, before the cooperatives, herders had one instrument against a dzud, the *otor* — driving the animals out to whatever pasture might still be reachable, on the family's own initiative and at the family's own risk. Something between 8.08 and 8.76 million animals died, which the sources put at between 32 and 33 per cent of every animal in Mongolia. A third of the national herd, gone in a season.

In the winter of 1967–68 the cold was of comparable severity. By then the cooperatives were universal, and behind them stood a system built for exactly this: prepared hay and fodder held in reserve, dug wells, constructed winter shelters, veterinary services, and — the item most easily missed and possibly the most important — the authority to move animals across district boundaries out of a stricken area into one that was not, which no individual family could have arranged for itself. That winter 2.6 million animals died, 11.9 per cent of the herd.

A third, and then an eighth. That is the benefit column, in the one denomination the man at the bottom actually kept his accounts in.

And the experiment has a third arm, because the arrangement was dismantled. When the cooperatives were broken up in 1991 and 1992 the herds were returned to families, which is what a great many people wanted and what the framework would ordinarily read as the exit dial swinging open. What went with the herds was the apparatus: the fodder reserves, the wells and shelters, the veterinary service, the marketing, the cross-boundary movement, the funding that had come from the Soviet Union. In the dzud of 1999–2000 a quarter of the national herd died. Across 2000 to 2002 the country's animals fell from over 33 million to 23 million. In 2009–10 something like 8.5 to 9.7 million died, a fifth of the total, with families in some districts left without a single animal, and 769,000 people — more than a quarter of the population — affected. The count of major dzuds since 1992 has already matched the count for the whole half-century from 1940 to 1991. Herders who lost everything walked to the ger districts of Ulaanbaatar and became the urban poor.

Set the three arms of that experiment beside one another and the arithmetic the herdsman was doing becomes legible without any need to speculate about his opinions. The arrangement he was inside had cut the mortality of the single event that could destroy him by roughly two-thirds, and when it was removed the mortality came back.

The rest of the column

The insurance was the largest entry but it was not the only one, and the others should be named because they are the reason the arrangement felt to most people like a life rather than a bargain.

A negdel member drew a wage. He was entitled to holidays and to a pension — an old herdsman with no sons was not, under this arrangement, a problem for his family to solve. He kept

animals of his own, up to a ceiling that varied by ecological zone, and by 1960 individual members still held 23.5 per cent of the country's livestock. The everyday craft remained his: where to graze, when to move camp, how to read the grass. What the state took over was the marketing and the production target.

Around him the state built what no Mongolian government had ever built. Literacy went from something like seventeen per cent in 1940 to eighty-three per cent by the late 1980s. A clinic and a school stood at the district centre; there were maternity waiting homes in nearly every county, a rational and accessible health system distributed across a country of almost no population density, and a World Bank assessment written seventeen years after the system's funding collapsed still found Mongolian health indicators markedly better than those of countries at the same income level, and attributed it to gains made in the socialist period. A herdsman's daughter could become a doctor in Ulaanbaatar or an engineer in Irkutsk, and a good many did.

And there is a demographic figure that stands over all of it. The 1918 census counted 542,505 Mongols. The first socialist-era census in 1956 counted about 800,000; the 1969 census 1.5 million; by 1989 the population was 2.1 million. The country roughly quadrupled its people in seventy years — in the same seventy years in which it also killed between twenty and forty thousand of them.

Both of those sentences belong in the column, and the discipline of this study is that neither is permitted to cancel the other.

The door that was open, and the exit that was shut

Now the puzzle can be answered, and the answer is not the one the framework would reach for first.

There was no wall. The physical exit dial stayed open the whole time: a family could load the ger onto a cart and be gone by noon, and the state had no realistic capacity to find them in a

country that size. There were administrative instruments — the negdel boundaries were made identical with the district boundaries in area and population, which is to say that the previous conqueror's banner had been rebuilt under a new name and a Mongolian still belonged to a unit of registration; the southern frontier closed hard after the Sino-Soviet split of 1960; travel abroad required permission. Those mattered at the margins. They do not explain a compliance rate of ninety-nine per cent among people whose houses have wheels.

What explains it is that leaving the cooperative did not mean escaping a constraint. It meant surrendering an insurance policy.

A family that walked out kept the steppe, the sky, the animals it could drive and its own good judgement, and lost the fodder reserve, the dug wells, the winter shelters, the veterinary drugs, the guaranteed purchase of its wool and hides, the right to be moved out of a stricken district, the school, the clinic, the pension and the wage. It kept, in other words, everything it had had in 1944, and the record of 1944 was that a third of the animals died.

The exit dial can be closed by provision as effectively as by barrier, and a door shut that way is held shut by the subject himself. That is the module's finding and it needs stating carefully, because it is not a claim that the provision was a trick. The fodder reserves were real; the wells were dug; the mortality figures are what they are. The point is structural rather than moral: an order that makes itself the thing standing between a population and the catastrophe that population most fears has purchased the same result as a border guard, at a lower cost, with no resentment generated, and with the subject's active consent — because the man is not prevented from leaving, he is made unable to afford to. And the two are not equivalent from the apex's side either, since a wall must be manned forever against people trying to get past it, while a service is defended by the very people it holds.

This is what the collection has meant by the gradient toward an order that runs itself, seen from underneath rather than from above. The Mongolian herdsman of 1975 did not experience the party secretary at the district centre as an overlord. He experienced him as the man who arranged the hay.

When exit was tried

The exception proves the reading, and it is worth putting beside the case next door.

Between 1929 and 1932 this order tried to take the herds without building any of that. The confiscations came first, then forced communisation of more than a third of herding households, with no fodder system, no veterinary apparatus and state trading organs that could not replace the private networks they had abolished. The herdsmen's response was to slaughter their own animals rather than surrender them — seven million head, about a third of the 1929 herd — and then, in April 1932, to rise, in a war that took seven months and Soviet armour and aircraft to end. Nothing else in seventy years produced anything like it.

Read through the ledger, that is not a mystery and not a demonstration of Mongolian love of freedom. It is the arithmetic turning over. In 1929 the arrangement offered the herdsman no insurance term at all and demanded the asset; compliance therefore threatened his survival as directly as revolt did, and when the two sides of the ledger read the same the man rises, because he has nothing left to lose. The order read this correctly and retreated: the collectives were dissolved, the animals returned, and the herd recovered to 27.5 million by 1941. When collectivisation was attempted again in the mid-1950s it came with the fodder, the wells, the shelters, the wage and the pension, and it met no resistance worth the name.

Now the comparison. In exactly the years of the Mongolian failure, the Soviet Union collectivised another nomadic pastoral people — the Kazakhs — inside its own borders. Between 1.3

and 2.3 million people died, something on the order of forty per cent of the Kazakh population; hundreds of thousands fled; those who tried to cross into China were shot at the border. Mongolia, running the same doctrine in the same decade against the same kind of economy, killed seven million animals and then stopped.

This study will not claim to know why with any confidence, and Module 8 is where the question belongs. But the difference is stark enough to record here: the Kazakh steppe was inside a union republic administered from Moscow, and Mongolia was a nominally sovereign state whose government could be told by the Comintern that it had gone too fast and could reverse without anyone losing a war. Whatever else the concession of sovereignty bought, it appears to have bought a shorter feedback loop.

The cost side, and when it stopped being needed

None of this means the cost column was empty. It was filled once, comprehensively, and the filling lasted.

Between 1937 and 1939 this order established the credibility of its own violence beyond any possible doubt: twenty to forty thousand dead in a country of three-quarters of a million, thirty-six of the fifty-one members of its own central committee, two former prime ministers, the entire senior officer corps, and the clergy. A cost binds only where the actor believes it will be imposed on him, and after 1939 there was no household in Mongolia that did not know somebody. The classification a man carried on his papers determined what he could do; his three-generation biography named his parents and grandparents; concealing a repressed relative was an ordinary competence of citizenship. The cost was credible and it stayed credible without needing to be repeated.

And it was not repeated. Choibalsan died in 1952, and the thirty-two years of Tsedenbal that followed were authoritarian, closed, censored and surveilled, but they were not terroristic in the way the 1930s had been. The order moved, over a generation, from holding the country with a very full cost column and a thin benefit column to holding it with a thin cost column and a very full benefit one — which is the gradient this collection has been tracing from the other direction, and it is worth naming that Mongolia travelled it faster and further than most.

The residue of the cost column in the late period was of a different kind: not the fear of being shot but the knowledge that advancement, housing, a university place for a child and permission to travel all ran through one institution, and that the institution kept a file. That is a cost, and it is a heavy one, but it is a cost paid in prospects rather than in life, and a population that has learned the difference prices it very differently.

What the pricing was, when they were finally asked

In December 1989 students began demonstrating in Ulaanbaatar. On 7 March 1990 about ten people, wearing traditional clothing that had been discouraged, began a hunger strike in Sükhbaatar Square. Crowds grew to tens of thousands. The Politburo resigned within days rather than clear the square; the clause naming the party as the guiding force and Marxism-Leninism as its instrument was struck from the constitution on 21 March; free elections were called.

What the protesters had demanded is itself evidence about the column. They asked for speech, press, assembly and multiparty elections; for the freedom to practise religion; and for the rehabilitation of the surviving ex-lamas and the families of the executed. They did not, in the main, ask for food, land, or the dissolution of the cooperatives.

Then the country voted, on 22 and 29 July 1990, with a turnout of 97.89 per cent. The Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party — the party of 1937, of the monasteries, of Choibalsan, contesting the first free election it had ever permitted — won 343 of the 430 seats in the upper chamber and 31 of the 50 in the new lower one. Two years later, under a new constitution, it won 70 of 76.

The qualifications are real and must be given. The electoral arrangements weighted rural districts where the party was strongest. The opposition had existed for weeks and had no organisation outside the capital. The party had already replaced its entire leadership, dropped its constitutional monopoly and distanced itself from Marxism-Leninism, so what voters returned was not quite what had governed them. And a population formed for seventy years by a single authority is not a neutral instrument for measuring that authority.

With every one of those held, the fact stands and it is the strongest single reading of the ledger this study will get. Given a genuinely free choice, at the moment the cost column emptied, with the apparatus of enforcement visibly in retreat and no one able to check how they voted, the majority of Mongolians returned the party that had built the schools and the clinics and the fodder reserves — and had also killed twenty to forty thousand people, most of them within living memory of the voters.

Reading the cost column against the framework

The subsistence model holds that the extractor drives the subject's share downward until it meets the revolt threshold, and that the threshold is fixed by two dials the extractor can turn: the credibility of the force that punishes rising, and the availability of exit. Where both are shut, extraction goes past subsistence to the bone.

This case turns the second dial in a way the model has not described, and the turn has a specific cause.

Where the extracted asset is destroyed by shocks that the subject cannot survive either, the extractor's own ledger acquires an insurance term — and the insurance, once built, closes the exit dial by provision rather than by barrier. One instrument does both jobs, which is why it gets built.

Follow the extractor's reasoning. In the classic case the good extracted is labour, and labour has the useful property of regenerating itself: squeeze the peasant, and next year there is another peasant. Nothing the weather does to him destroys the extractor's asset in a way the extractor cannot recoup by squeezing harder. But an animal is capital, not labour; it takes years to replace; and a dzud does not reduce the extractor's take, it annihilates the stock that produces the take, across a whole region, in a season. A rational extractor of pastoral wealth therefore *must* insure the herd, not from benevolence but because the alternative is losing a third of his own asset once a decade. The fodder reserve is on the extractor's ledger before it is on anyone's conscience.

And having built it he discovers that he has also solved his other problem, the one this terrain made otherwise insoluble. The same reserve that protects his asset is the thing that makes leaving unaffordable for the man holding the animals. He has not fenced the steppe — it cannot be fenced — and he has not needed to. He has become the thing between the herdsman and the winter.

Three consequences for how the collection reads other cases.

First, the diagnostic for exit has to be widened. Asking whether a subject could physically leave will return the wrong answer wherever the order supplies something the subject cannot replace and cannot survive without. The question that discriminates is what leaving would cost in the denomination the subject actually keeps — and where an order has made itself the insurer

of last resort, the honest reading is that the exit dial is near zero even with every door standing open. **A wall is defended by the guards. A service is defended by the people it holds.**

Second, the direction of the floor reverses under pastoral extraction. The model's engine drives the subject's share down because every increment left to him is surplus lost. That holds where the surplus is the whole of what the subject produces. It does not hold where a share of what is left to him is what keeps the productive stock alive through the shock — and the fodder, the wells, the winter shelters and the veterinary drugs are exactly that. Here the extractor raised the floor and had reasons in his own ledger for doing it. That is not mercy, and it should not be read as mercy; it is the same arithmetic reaching a different result because the asset has a different physics.

Third, and this is what the collection should carry into the collapse module, the reversal in 1991 is the model's own prediction running backwards and it can be measured. The dial of exit swung fully open; the herds were returned; the cooperatives were dissolved; nobody was compelled to do anything. On the standard reading the floor beneath the man at the bottom should have risen. It fell — from 33 million animals to 23 million in four years, with families left with nothing and walking to the capital. What moved was not extraction but provision, and the model does not currently distinguish the two, because in the cases it was built from the extractor supplied nothing that the subject would miss. **Where an order's hold runs through provision rather than through extraction, its collapse does not free the subject; it exposes him — and the same arithmetic that measures the hold measures the exposure.**

That is not an argument for the arrangement. It is an argument that the ledger has to be read in the units the man at the bottom actually used, and in this country those units were animals and winters.

A note on sources.

Contested and quantitative material, with provenance. The dzud comparison at the centre of this module rests on two independent sources that agree closely. A study of dzud and the industrialisation of pastoralism in socialist Mongolia, published in *Asian Journal of Sociology* (Taylor & Francis, 2021) — I have the article's content but not its authorship confirmed, and the attribution should be checked before citation — gives 8.08 million animals dead in 1944–45, 33.2 per cent of the national herd, and records Komiyama's list of major dzud years as 1943, 1945, 1950, 1968, 2000, 2001, 2002 and 2010, noting that major dzuds since 1992 have already matched the total for 1940–1991. The teaching essay published by the Association for Asian Studies gives 8.76 million and 32.2 per cent for 1944–45 against 2.6 million and 11.9 per cent for 1967–68, describes the two winters as of comparable temperature and severity, and attributes the difference to the fodder system introduced under the cooperatives and funded from the USSR. Both figures for 1944–45 are reported here as a range. The post-socialist figures — a quarter of the herd in 1999–2000, the fall from 33 million to 23 million between 1999 and 2003, and 8.5 to 9.7 million dead or twenty to twenty-two per cent in 2009–10 with 769,000 people affected — come from the World Bank's dzud studies, from Rao and colleagues in *Environmental Research Letters* (2015), and from press reporting; the variation between 20 and 22 per cent for 2010 reflects differing bases and is not resolved.

Livestock ownership shares for 1950 and 1960, the ninety-nine per cent membership figure, the private-herd ceilings and the peak of 27.5 million head in 1941 are as given in Module 2 of this study, from the Library of Congress country study and its Mongolian statistical sources. Population figures: 542,505 Mongols in the 1918 census, via Maiskii; roughly 800,000 at the 1956 census, 1.5 million in 1969 and 2.1 million in 1989. Literacy of 82.9 per cent is a 1988 estimate reproduced in the CIA

World Factbook. The World Bank's 2007 judgement that Mongolia's health indicators are strong for its income level and reflect gains made in the socialist period is quoted in substance rather than in words.

The 1990 election returns — turnout of 97.89 per cent, 343 of 430 seats in the People's Great Khural and 31 of 50 in the State Little Khural, and 70 of 76 in 1992 on a turnout of 95.6 per cent — are the official results as reproduced in the reference literature; the criticism that the system favoured rural districts where the party was strongest is made in that same literature and is recorded in the module rather than set aside. The account of the December 1989 to March 1990 sequence, including the hunger strike of 7 March and the removal of the guiding-role clause on 21 March, draws on the reference literature and on the Global Nonviolent Action Database's case study; sources differ on whether the Politburo's resignation is dated to 9, 14 or 21 March, and the module gives the sequence rather than a single date.

The Kazakh comparison — 1.3 to 2.3 million dead, roughly forty per cent of the Kazakh population, hundreds of thousands of refugees, and Kazakhs shot at the Chinese frontier — is from the standard reference account of the famine of 1930–33, which rests on Sarah Cameron, Niccolò Pianciola and Isabelle Ohayon. It is offered as a comparison and not as an argument; the causal claim about sovereignty and the feedback loop is flagged in the text as belonging to a later module.

Framework and scholarship. Robert Carneiro's circumscription theory is used in the qualified form this collection has settled on — one strong route to capturability rather than a law, with the New Guinea highlands as the standing counter-example and Carneiro's own later softening noted. The two-dial model of the revolt threshold, and the reading of the Black Death as a natural experiment on the exit dial, are from this collection's own study of the subsistence equilibrium, which leans in turn on Mancur Olson on the stationary bandit, James Scott on the sub-

sistence ethic, and Acemoglu and Wolitzky on coercion and outside options; the module's argument that provision can close the exit dial is offered as a revision to that account rather than an application of it.

Two cautions. The negdel is a contested memory in Mongolia: there is a substantial body of recollection describing it as security, schooling and dignity, and a substantial body describing it as compulsion and surveillance, and the two are held by people who lived through the same decades in the same districts. The material used here — including the herder quoted in *National Geographic* saying the collective was good to them, with enough food and free health care and education for the children — is drawn from the favourable side of that record, and a module built only from it would be a brief. It is offered against the mortality arithmetic, which is not a memory. Second, every socialist-period statistic in this module was produced by the state whose performance it measures, including the literacy figures and the livestock counts, and the post-1990 figures were produced by governments with an interest in the comparison running the other way.

Module Six

AT NOMINAL PRICES

Module 6 · Extraction — a monopsony built by outbidding the competition and then expelling it; a farmgate price set in the 1960s and left unchanged until 1991, sealed off from every world price; half a million horses, five million sheep and one fifth of the animals at the Soviet front, delivered at nominal prices during the war; and a debt of eleven and a half billion in a currency that no longer existed, settled at three cents in the dollar

A case study in the Patterns of Power series · Thomas J. Bryan with Claude (Anthropic) · held as tested, not revealed

What there is to look for

In the colonial cases this collection has worked through, extraction is legible because it is written on a schedule. There is a rate, a base, and a receipt: a hut tax of ten shillings, a tithe of one fifth, a corvée of so many days. And the most instructive mechanism is often the monopoly — a chartered company made the sole lawful buyer of a crop, setting the price it will pay and the price at which it will sell what the grower must buy back, so that the grower is squeezed twice by the same hand and never sees a competing offer.

Under a planned economy none of that survives in recognisable form. There is no tithe. There is no chartered company, because every company is the state. Income tax is trivial and the state does not need it, since the state owns the product before the question of taxing anyone arises.

What there is instead is a plan and a procurement price. Somewhere a document states how much of a good a producing unit must deliver and the price the sole permitted purchaser will pay for it, and where that price sits below what the good is

worth the difference is the extraction, taken silently, without a receipt, and recorded in the accounts as a purchase. Find the quota, find the price, find who set them, and follow where the product went. That is the module, and the useful thing about a planned economy is that it generates paper.

How the only buyer got to be the only buyer

The most surprising fact in the module is at the beginning, and it inverts the usual sequence.

Before 1921 Mongolian trade ran through Chinese firms, and the terms were bad: credit advanced against tea and cloth and metal, at interest, against debts that reached nine million taels for the four aimags on the government's own 1921 estimate and perhaps thirty million by the mid-1920s on other counts. In 1925 something like eighty-six per cent of Mongolian wool went to China and thirteen per cent to the Soviet Union. There were 301 foreign firms in the country, 283 of them Chinese.

The Soviet trade organisations displaced them by paying more. A Mongolian account of the period gives the figures directly: a *gin* of wool, six hundred grams, was bought by Siberian state trade for twenty-five to twenty-seven cents against the twenty cents the Chinese traders paid; a pound of Soviet sugar sold at 12.19 tögrög against 16.85 for the Japanese equivalent, and was reported to be better. Loans came at low rates. The share moved fast. Wool going to the USSR went from 13 per cent in 1925 to 76 per cent in 1926; by 1928 the Soviet-Mongolian trading organisations were handling 89.4 per cent of the wool against 29.4 per cent four years earlier, 84 per cent of animal skin, 76 per cent of sheepskin.

Then the competition was removed rather than beaten. The treaty of 1929 established that each country would treat the other as outside its policy on foreign capital and no third country would be granted the exception; the Soviet state took the exclusive right to export raw materials, hides and fur from Mongolia.

Chinese traders were expelled that year. Registered foreigners were required to leave; those who resisted were forcibly removed, and Mongolian accounts put the number driven out of Ulaanbaatar alone at over four thousand. By 1940 something like ninety per cent of retail trade ran through state and cooperative organisations.

A monopsony assembled by outbidding is a different object from one assembled by decree, and the difference matters for how it is read afterwards. Every party to it — the herdsman selling his wool, the official arranging the sale, the Soviet trade agent — could observe, correctly, that the new buyer paid better than the old one. The improvement was real. It was also the mechanism by which the alternative buyers were driven from the field, after which the question of what the price ought to be had no external answer, because there was nobody left to make a competing offer.

The price, once there was only one buyer

What that price then did over the following half-century is documented, and the documentation is unusually plain because it comes from an institution examining the system in order to dismantle it.

The IMF's assessment of the Mongolian economy at the point of transition describes a price system in which farmgate, wholesale and retail prices were adjusted rarely, were isolated from one another, and — apart from one small adjustment in 1986 — were **fully insulated from changes in trade prices**. Farmgate prices were set low, deliberately, in order to keep retail food cheap and to keep agricultural raw materials cheap as inputs to industry. And until early 1991 those prices remained virtually unchanged from the 1960s. State orders for delivery to procurement centres and state enterprises ensured the supplies came in.

Read that paragraph slowly, because it contains the entire extractive mechanism of the mature system.

A compulsory delivery obligation — the state order. A price fixed by the purchaser rather than negotiated. That price set deliberately below what would clear a market, with the stated purpose of subsidising somebody else. The price held constant for three decades, so that whatever real value it represented in 1962 had been steadily eroded by 1988 without anyone ever having to announce a reduction. And, most consequential of all, a wall between that price and the price the product fetched when it left the country, so that a rise in the world price of cashmere or copper or hides could not reach the man who produced it, and neither could a fall.

The last of these is the one to hold. **A producer who cannot see the price his product fetches downstream cannot form a view about whether he is being paid fairly, and a population that cannot form the view cannot act on it.** The classic colonial monopsony leaves the grower able in principle to discover the world price — from a rival buyer, a newspaper, a neighbouring colony — and the record of colonial produce is full of growers who found out and were furious. Here the wall was structural, and it was built into the accounting rather than enforced by censorship.

The war

The one period in which the extraction is fully visible, quantified and admitted is 1941 to 1945, and the numbers are extraordinary for a country of fewer than a million people.

Mongolia transferred to the Soviet Union something on the order of 485,000 to 500,000 horses — steppe animals that on the Russian accounts constituted about one in five of the horses at the front in 1943 to 1945. It sent something over 700,000 head of cattle, close to five million sheep and goats, and more than 500,000 tons of meat. It was in effect the sole supplier of sheep-

skin to the Red Army, for the winter coats. Over the war years something like 740 wagonloads went north in six batches: thirty thousand sheepskin garments, thirty thousand pairs of felt boots, thirty thousand fur-lined coats, a thousand tons of meat, hundreds of tons of butter, sausage and confectionery, and some twenty-seven thousand antelope carcasses. Alongside the goods went 300 kilograms of gold, a hundred thousand American dollars, and several million tögrög, which paid for a tank brigade of thirty-two T-34s and twenty-one T-70s presented in January 1943 and for an air squadron after it.

The Russian account of these deliveries, written to praise them, contains the operative phrase: alongside the donations, Mongolia made regular large deliveries of meat, wool, sheepskin and horses to the USSR **at nominal prices**, and in return Moscow supplied manufactured and food products and offset Mongolian debts.

And the donations were a levy. Mongolian accounts record a campaign slogan to the effect that no person was to be without a personal contribution to the Red Army fund — a formula that describes compulsory participation whatever the noun in front of it. One herdswoman's contribution is recorded as sixteen camels, ninety-three horses, sixteen hundred sheep and ten thousand tögrög, a sum reckoned as the price of twelve and a half thousand more sheep. The state meanwhile put something like a tenth of the population under arms and spent half the budget on the military.

The cost is visible in the herd. Livestock had recovered to 27.5 million head by 1941 after the collectivisation disaster; by 1945, with taxes in kind and obligatory delivery instituted, it was around 20 million. And the country's own official history is clear that this wartime machinery of taxes in kind and compulsory delivery is what the peacetime procurement system of the 1950s was then built on.

And then the flow reversed

If the module stopped there it would describe an ordinary extractive colony. It cannot stop there, because from roughly the 1950s the direction of the visible flow turns around and stays turned around for forty years.

Mongolia joined Comecon in 1962 and was allocated a place in what the doctrine called the international socialist division of labour: raw materials out, everything manufactured in. By the mid-1980s some 96.7 per cent of Mongolian imports came from Comecon countries, about 80 per cent from the Soviet Union directly, with 1.6 per cent from China and North Korea and 1.7 per cent from the non-communist world. Mongolia depended on the USSR for fuel, medicine and spare parts, and the USSR was the market for essentially all Mongolian industry.

Against that came money on a scale that is difficult to overstate. Soviet assistance is put at more than ten per cent of Mongolian GNP in the late 1970s and at around thirty per cent of GDP and thirty per cent of the state budget in the late 1980s; the estimates for aid between 1955 and 1983 run to around seven billion dollars, with annual figures of five to seven hundred million by the late 1980s. More than seven hundred projects were built. An economist who worked on the Mongolian transition puts it plainly: the Soviet credits financed nearly everything — budget deficits, trade deficits, infrastructure, construction — and they grew through the 1980s.

The flagship of the arrangement is also its sharpest single instance of ordinary extraction. The Erdenetiin-Ovoo copper and molybdenum deposit was found in 1968 by Mongolian and Czechoslovak geologists; a joint venture was agreed in November 1973 on a fifty-fifty basis; a fourteen-thousand-strong Mongolian and Soviet workforce built the pit, the mill and a whole city; four hundred and thirty kilometres of power line were run from a Soviet station to feed it because Mongolia could not; and the plant opened in December 1978. Its copper then went to the

Soviet Union at below-market prices, which is on the record as a source of Mongolian resentment at what Mongolians themselves called a semi-colonial relationship. In 1991 the shares were restruck at 51 to Mongolia and 49 to Russia.

Erdenet therefore holds both halves of the case in one asset. The capital, the technology, the engineers, the power and the city were supplied by the metropole at its own cost; the product left at a price the metropole set. A recent scholarly treatment of it uses the phrase *extractive assistance*, and that is the right shape: not extraction with some assistance attached, and not assistance with some extraction attached, but one operation that was both, running through the same pipe in the same direction at the same time.

A ledger that cannot be settled

What all this added up to was recorded, and the record is where the module reaches its real finding.

By 1990 Mongolia owed the Soviet Union something in the order of 11.4 billion transferable roubles. On the most-quoted comparison that was roughly ten times Mongolia's entire 1990 GDP. Standard & Poor's put the burden in the early 2000s at around ten billion dollars.

In 2003 and 2004 Russia and Mongolia settled it. Russia wrote off about ninety-seven or ninety-eight per cent, and Mongolia paid something between 250 and 300 million dollars. A residual tranche was written off again on the same terms in 2010 and ratified in 2016.

The Russian deputy finance minister who negotiated it explained the difficulty in one clause: the debt was denominated in a currency that no longer existed, and a debtor in that position can always take the line **"no currency, no obligations."**

That remark is the module's hinge, and it should be taken as a statement about the whole seventy years rather than about a negotiation.

The transferable rouble was not money. It was a unit of account for settling balances inside a bloc, not convertible, not traded, not priced by anyone outside the arrangement. The tögrög was not convertible either. The farmgate prices were administered and sealed off from trade prices by design. The trade prices themselves were negotiated between two governments, one of which was supplying the other's fuel, machinery, engineers and credit. Erdenet's copper moved between two owners of the same enterprise at a price they agreed with each other.

So the question that the framework wants to ask — was more taken out than was put in — has no determinate answer, and not because the archive is thin. **It has no answer because there was no price outside the arrangement at which any item in it could be valued, and the accounting unit in which the balance was struck has since been abolished.** Value the copper at world prices and Mongolia was robbed. Value the fuel, the plant, the power lines and the credits at world prices and Mongolia received a subsidy on a scale few countries have ever had. Value the debt at face and Mongolia owed ten years of national output; value it as it was actually settled and it owed three cents in the dollar. Every one of those is a defensible calculation and they point in opposite directions.

The Mongolian position, held sincerely and with evidence, is that a country was specialised into raw materials, denied processing industry, sold its copper below market and its wool at a price set in the 1960s, and got a mono-industrial dependency in return. The Russian position, held sincerely and with evidence, is that the Soviet Union built Mongolia — the mines, the cities, the railways, the power stations, seven hundred projects, thirty per cent of the budget — and then forgave the bill. Neither side is lying and neither can be shown to be wrong.

The two extractions, and who actually paid

Underneath the unanswerable question sits an answerable one, and the framework should not let the first obscure the second.

There were two extractions here, stacked, and they had different beneficiaries.

The *external* one — whatever the terms of trade actually did between Ulaanbaatar and Moscow — is the one that cannot be settled, and it is also the one that never touched a herdsman.

The *internal* one can be stated exactly. A compulsory delivery quota, a farmgate price set deliberately low to subsidise urban food and industrial inputs, held unchanged from the 1960s to 1991, insulated from every downstream price. That extraction ran continuously for thirty years and its direction is not in doubt: from the herding household to the Mongolian state, and thence to the cities, the industrial plant, the army, the schools and the clinics.

And this is where the framework's medium-of-payment discipline pays off in an unexpected form. In the colonial cases the instrument is a tax payable only in the conqueror's coin, levied on a household that holds none, which converts a subsistence household into a wage-earning one and produces labour without any law compelling it. Here the conversion is the same and the instrument is the mirror image. The herdsman was not required to obtain currency he did not have; he was required to hand over product and was *given* currency, in an amount somebody else decided, which he could then spend only in state shops at prices somebody else decided. He was moved from subsistence into a monetary economy just as completely, and by an instrument that presented itself as a payment rather than a demand.

A price is a demand wearing the grammar of an offer. That is what a nominal price is, and it is why the mature Soviet system needed no tax schedule: the taking had been relocated into the accounting, where it appears as a purchase, generates a

receipt, and leaves the man who was taken from holding money and therefore, on the face of the record, having been paid.

Reading extraction against the framework

The collection's card carries a family it has argued once and marked as pending a second case: the *buffer or positional colony* — a holding kept for where it sits rather than what it yields, whose extraction term is negative and whose returns arrive as a contingent payout rather than an income stream. Mongolia is that second case, and running it here sharpens the family rather than merely confirming it.

The extraction term on a positional holding reads negative in the visible accounts because the return is not a good and therefore has no line in them. The Soviet Union was not buying wool. It was buying the absence of a Chinese or Japanese army on fifteen hundred miles of Siberian frontier, and there is no price series for that. What it paid was continuous, itemised and enormous — the credits, the plant, the fuel, the engineers, the seat at the United Nations bought with a Security Council trade. What it received was a contingency: a thing that is worth nothing at all in an ordinary year and everything in a bad one.

And the record shows exactly when the claim was made. Between 1941 and 1945 a country of under a million people put a tenth of its population under arms, spent half its budget on the military, and delivered one in five of the horses at the Soviet front along with five million sheep and half a million tons of meat, at nominal prices. During the Sino-Soviet confrontation from the 1960s it accepted Soviet divisions on its territory and closed its southern border. That is the payout, drawn in the two crises for which the premium had been paid.

This gives the family its diagnostic, which it did not have before. **Where the visible ledger of a holding runs the wrong way, do not conclude there was no extraction — find the**

crisis, and read what was demanded during it. In ordinary years a positional holding looks like charity, because an insurance premium always looks like charity until the claim. The extraction is real, it is simply lumpy and contingent, and it will not be found by totalling trade balances across the decades. It will be found in the two or three years when the thing being insured against actually happened.

Two further consequences follow, and the second is the one this study will carry forward.

First, the unmeasurability is not an accident of the archive; it is a property of the arrangement, and arguably a function of it. A monopsony that also issues the currency in which its purchases are denominated, supplies the inputs its supplier must buy back, holds the resulting debt, and settles that debt in a unit of account it can later abolish has made the terms of trade undeterminable in principle. The consequence is that both parties can hold, sincerely and permanently, that they were the one subsidising the other — and this is precisely what Russia and Mongolia do hold today, each with a real case. The collection's instruction on such disputes has been to report them and not adjudicate. This case supplies the reason that instruction is correct rather than merely prudent: there is no fact of the matter to adjudicate, and a study that picks a side is not being brave, it is choosing a set of shadow prices and then forgetting that it chose them.

Second, and this compounds directly with the finding on the cost column, the same structure appears at two levels of this order and does the same work at both. At the household level, the state made itself the fodder reserve — the thing standing between the herdsman and the winter that would destroy him — and thereby closed his exit without a fence. At the state level, the Soviet Union made itself the credit, the fuel, the spare parts and the market — the thing standing between Mongolia and its own southern neighbour — and thereby closed Mongolia's exit without an annexation. In each case the hold runs through provi-

sion rather than through extraction; in each case the provision was real and the dependence was total; and in each case the arrangement's collapse did not free the dependant but exposed him. When the aid stopped in 1990 and 1991, GDP fell for four consecutive years for a cumulative loss of about a fifth of national income, inflation reached the high hundreds, and poverty passed fifty per cent. The herds were privatised in the same years, and a quarter of the national flock died in the next dzud.

An order that holds by supplying does not have to be obeyed. It has to be needed — and the measure of how completely it was needed is taken not while it stands but in the four years after it stops.

A note on sources.

Quoted directly and briefly: the Russian deputy finance minister Sergei Storchak's formulation that a debtor whose obligation is denominated in an abolished currency may say there is no currency and therefore no obligation, from reporting of the Russian–Mongolian debt settlement in *The Diplomat* (2016). The phrase *at nominal prices*, describing the wartime deliveries, is the wording used in the Russian account of Mongolia's contribution to the Soviet war effort published by *Russia Beyond*; it should be read with the awareness that this is a Russian state-adjacent outlet writing in praise of the deliveries, which makes the admission more rather than less useful. The characterisation of Erdenet's copper as shipped to the USSR below market prices, and of Mongolian resentment at a semi-colonial relationship, is from Wilson Center and *Diplomat* reporting on the mine's later sale.

The account of the mature price system — farmgate, wholesale and retail prices adjusted infrequently, isolated from each other, insulated from trade prices apart from a small 1986 adjustment, farmgate prices set low to subsidise retail food and industrial inputs, unchanged from the 1960s until early 1991, with

state orders securing delivery — is paraphrased from the International Monetary Fund's published assessment of reform in the Mongolian People's Republic. This is the module's single most load-bearing source and it is worth going to directly; it is an outside institution describing the mechanism at the moment of its dismantling, which is the least interested vantage available on this question.

The 1920s trade figures — 25 to 27 cents per *gin* of wool from Siberian state trade against 20 from Chinese traders, Soviet sugar at 12.19 tögrög against 16.85 for Japanese, wool exports shifting from 86 per cent to China in 1925 to 76 per cent to the USSR in 1926, and the 1928 shares of 89.4 per cent of wool, 84 per cent of animal skin and 76 per cent of sheepskin — come from a 2023 article on the history of Mongolian foreign trade in *Modern Diplomacy* citing Shagdarsuren (1988), and from a Mongolian popular-historical account of Soviet economic control. Both are at one remove from Mongolian-language sources I have not read. The count of 301 foreign firms in 1925, of which 283 were Chinese, is from a *Foreign Affairs* article of April 1931, which is a contemporary source and useful for that reason. The institutional chronology — Montsenkoop in December 1921, the Mongolian Commercial and Industrial Bank in June 1924, the tögrög in December 1925, Stormong in 1927, the expulsion of Chinese traders and the 1929 treaty, Mongsovbuner and its 1934 transfer to Mongolian ownership — is from the Library of Congress country study and the Soviet-era reference literature, which agree because they descend from the same official histories.

Contested figures with provenance. The wartime deliveries are given variously: 485,000 to 500,000 horses; over 700,000 cattle; 4.9 to 5 million sheep and goats; over 500,000 tons of meat; 740 wagonloads or echelons in six batches; 30,000 each of sheepskin garments, felt boots and fur-lined coats; 27,000 antelope carcasses; 300 kg of gold; 100,000 US dollars; 2.5 to 4.5 million tögrög; 53 or 54 tanks of which 32 T-34s and 21 T-70s.

The claim that Mongolian horses were about one in five at the Soviet front in 1943–45 is Russian and celebratory and should be treated as an order of magnitude. The slogan requiring a personal contribution from every person is reported in accounts I regard as unreliable individually but which agree, and it is paraphrased rather than quoted for that reason. The figures for Soviet aid — over 10 per cent of GNP in the late 1970s, around 30 per cent of GDP and of the state budget in the late 1980s, roughly $7 billion between 1955 and 1983, $500–700 million a year late in the period — are Western estimates from the Library of Congress study and the CIA *World Factbook*, made by an interested party during a confrontation. The debt of 11.4 billion transferable roubles, the 97–98 per cent write-off and the payment of $250–300 million are on the record from both governments and from Standard & Poor's; the comparison to roughly ten times 1990 GDP is Bill Bikales's, in an interview on the Mongolian transition. The GDP contraction of 1990–93 is given variously as a cumulative fifth or a cumulative 22 per cent; both are reported.

Scholarship, credited. The Cambridge *Urban History* article on copper mining, socialist development and urban planning in Mongolia between 1962 and 1983 supplies the Erdenet construction detail and the phrase *extractive assistance*, which names the module's central problem better than anything this study would have arrived at independently; it is used and credited rather than borrowed. Bill Bikales's account of the transition, given in interview on the UCL Emerging Subjects blog, is the source for the reading of the Soviet credits as having financed nearly everything.

One caution larger than the rest. Every figure above was produced by an interested party. The socialist-era output and price statistics were produced by the state whose performance they measure. The aid estimates were produced by Western agencies during a strategic confrontation with the donor. The wartime contribution figures were produced and are still curated by Rus-

sian and Mongolian institutions with a shared interest in the story of fraternal sacrifice. The debt figures were produced in a negotiation between a creditor wanting a headline write-off and a debtor wanting a small payment. And the question the module is asking — who extracted from whom — is a live political question in both capitals today. This study reports what each side counts and does not adjudicate, and the module argues that the refusal to adjudicate is not caution but the correct finding.

Part of the collection Patterns of Power. *Tested, never revealed.*

Module Seven

FRATERNAL AND DISINTERESTED

Module 7 · Information and Suppression — an order that could not hide fifty thousand foreign soldiers and did not try, and hid instead the agreement under which they stood; a censor facing both directions at once, which the collection's standing finding says should not exist; three occasions on which a statement about the world was converted into a fact about a man's allegiance; and the one measurement in the country that could not be annulled, because every family could count its own animals

A case study in the Patterns of Power series · Thomas J. Bryan with Claude (Anthropic) · held as tested, not revealed

The finding this case breaks, stated first

This collection reached a conclusion about colonial information control that was arrived at reluctantly and has held across a run of European cases: the censor existed and was not needed. Toward the conquered there was censorship, often heavy. Toward the metropole there was almost nothing, because nothing had to be hidden. The facts about what was done in the colonies travelled home freely — printed in official reports, argued in parliaments, published in books that went through many editions — and they moved nothing. The dominant register at the metropolitan end was not suppression but inattention.

That does not hold here, and the reason is the one the robe module identified.

A French deputy could read an account of a punitive column in Algeria and feel nothing much, because the account did not bear on anything he believed about himself. A Soviet citizen

reading an accurate account of the Mongolian arrangement would have been reading a refutation of a proposition his state had made load-bearing: that the era of empires was over on one side of a line and continuing on the other, and that what the Soviet Union did in Asia was categorically unlike what the British and the French had done there. Where the metropole's own account of itself is the thing at risk, indifference is not available as a defence. So the apparatus here was enormous, permanent, and faced in both directions at once.

And it faced in a third direction as well, which the framework has not previously had to accommodate: inward, at the apparatus itself, because the doctrine it ran on was held as a demonstrated science and therefore could not be wrong.

Fifty thousand men

Begin with the fact that could not be concealed and was not.

Under the Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance renewed in January 1966 — Brezhnev came to Ulaanbaatar with Gromyko and Marshal Malinovsky, the first Soviet delegation of that rank ever to visit — Soviet forces were stationed in Mongolia. By 1985 there were about 75,000 of them, in two tank and three motorised rifle divisions, with something like 1,800 tanks, 320 aircraft and helicopters, and missile bases, spread across a country whose entire population was under two million. Choir, Baganuur, Choibalsan. The Mongolian army was doubled at Soviet request. Whole garrison towns existed for them.

You cannot hide that. Nobody in Mongolia was unaware that there were Soviet divisions in the country, any more than a Mongolian could be unaware of the Trans-Mongolian railway or the copper city at Erdenet. The soldiers bought things in shops. Their children went to schools.

What was hidden was the paper.

The 1966 treaty was published and contained a clause permitting the stationing of troops. It also carried defence-related agreements that were not published. And when the Soviets had surveyed the ground and were ready, a separate instrument was executed at Ulaanbaatar on 4 March 1967 — an agreement between the two governments on stationing a contingent of Soviet troops on the territory of the Mongolian People's Republic — signed for Mongolia by the defence minister Lkhagvasüren and for the Soviet side by the commander of the Transbaikal district. It was secret, and, according to the Mongolian account of it, it obliged both parties to maintain confidentiality about the agreement itself.

A treaty with a clause requiring silence about the treaty is a very precise object, and it is worth stating exactly what it accomplishes. It does not conceal the soldiers. It conceals the *terms*. And the terms are the only thing that answers the question a population would actually want answered, which is not *are they here* — everyone can see that they are here — but **on what basis are they here, for how long, and can we ask them to leave.** A citizen who knows the fact and not the instrument knows something that cannot be turned into a question. He is in the position of a man who can see a lodger in his house but has never been shown the lease.

Meanwhile the public vocabulary ran in the other direction. Addressing the anniversary of the Mongolian army in May 1968, the same defence minister who had signed the secret agreement fourteen months earlier praised the Soviet Union's aid as **fraternal and disinterested**. That was not a lie in any sense he would have recognised; the aid was enormous and much of it was given on terms no commercial creditor would have offered. It was, however, a description of a garrison as a gift.

The problem with no word

Underneath all of this sits a difficulty this order never solved, and it is the informational core of the case.

There was no available vocabulary for what the relationship actually was. *Colony* was excluded by doctrine, which held colonialism to be a feature of capitalism and its abolition to be the Soviet Union's distinguishing achievement. *Protectorate* and *satellite* were enemy words. *Annexation* was excluded by the fact — Mongolia was a sovereign state with a UN seat, and its sovereignty was the thing the Soviet Union had spent fifteen years and a Security Council trade to have witnessed. The words that remained — fraternal assistance, socialist internationalism, disinterested aid, the international socialist division of labour — described a relationship between equals with no asymmetry in it at all.

That is not merely propaganda. It is a genuine descriptive vacancy, and it had consequences for what could be thought as well as for what could be said. A Mongolian official who wanted to raise, inside the party, the observation that his country's economic role was being assigned from outside had no term in which to raise it that did not immediately convict him of something. Nor did his Soviet counterpart. **A vocabulary with no word for a relationship makes that relationship not merely unmentionable but unformulable, and the difference matters: an unmentionable thing can be thought in silence and written down later, while an unformulable one has to be reinvented from scratch by whoever wants to name it.** What Mongolians say now — that this was a semi-colonial relationship, which is the phrase that surfaced in the 1990s around Erdenet's copper — is a term that had to be borrowed back from outside the system after the system fell.

The error was in a person, three times

The addendum this study works from names an operation the framework did not previously have. *Censorship* concedes that a fact is a fact and forbids its circulation. **Annulment rules that the fact was not a fact** — the count is declared improperly conducted, the people who produced it are prosecuted for professional failure rather than for a political offence, and the question is removed from the next instrument so that the observation cannot be made again. The general mechanism behind it is stated plainly: where a governing claim cannot be revised, a result that contradicts it cannot be an error in the claim, so it must be an error in a person, which converts an epistemic problem into a personnel problem and generates an unbounded demand for investigators.

Mongolia does not supply a cancelled census. What it supplies is the same conversion performed three times, on three quite different objects, across twenty-seven years, by an apparatus that got better at it and less lethal as it went.

1937. The country's own leadership had produced, over the preceding decade, an accumulating record of failure: a collectivisation that lost seven million animals, a seven-month war against its own herders, a monastic establishment that would not shrink under taxation or persuasion, a party that had to be told by the Comintern that it had gone too fast. None of that could be an error in the doctrine, which was a science. It was resolved as a fact about persons, and specifically about their foreign allegiance: Order 366 of 3 September 1937 declared that many in Mongolia had fallen under the influence of Japanese spies and provocateurs, and between twenty and forty thousand people were then killed, including thirty-six of the fifty-one members of the party's own central committee. The doctrine emerged intact.

1962. A commemoration of Chinggis Khan's eight-hundredth anniversary was authorised by the Politburo in February, run

through the spring, and given a broadly favourable front page in *Ünen* on 31 May. Soviet historians objected; the objection hardened into a denunciation of Chinggis as reactionary; and what had been a question about how a socialist state should treat its own national founder was resolved as a fact about Daramyn Tömör-Ochir, who was found on 10 September to have exhibited tendencies toward idealising Chinggis and inflaming nationalist passions, and to have neglected the merits of Marshal Choibalsan. He was expelled, exiled, and killed with an axe in 1985. The question was not asked again for twenty-eight years.

1964. In December, several members of the central committee — Tsogt-Ochiryn Lookhuuz, who had run the Chief Directorate of State Farms through the virgin-lands campaign, with Baldandorjiin Nyambuu, Bandiin Surmaajav and others — used the precedent of Khrushchev's forced retirement two months earlier to raise the question of Tsedenbal's leadership. The historical work on the episode, based on the plenum speeches, finds that what they actually said was about corruption and incompetence in the Mongolian leadership; they barely touched foreign policy, and only Lookhuuz criticised over-reliance on Moscow.

Tsedenbal answered that it was an attempted coup engineered by pro-Chinese sympathisers and spies. Moscow, which was worried about Chinese subversion in the socialist camp, endorsed that version. By decree of the Council of Ministers in January 1965 the men were exiled to the countryside for twenty-five years. Lookhuuz, who had directed the country's state farms, spent eleven years as a shepherd and pig farmer at Kharkhorin, then six years in prison at Züünkharaa, then eight more in Khövsgöl. He was rehabilitated in 1990, given his property back and twenty-five years of back wages, and elected to the Great Khural that July.

Set the three side by side and the shape is identical while the vocabulary and the penalty change. Each time an observation about the world — this policy is failing, this nation has a

founder, these officials are incompetent — arrived in a system that had no place to put it, because the doctrine could not be the thing at fault. Each time it was re-described as a fact about the loyalty of the person who made it, and specifically about that person's connection to whichever foreign power was currently the threat: Japanese in 1937, and Chinese in 1962 and 1964. And each time the re-description was accepted by everyone who needed to accept it, including by Moscow, which had its own reasons for finding a Chinese hand plausible.

The tell is the enemy changing while the sentence stays the same. An order that identifies real conspiracies produces different-shaped findings as the conspiracies differ. An order running this conversion produces the same finding every time with a new nationality inserted, because the finding is not an output of an investigation; it is the only available disposal for a class of input.

The emergency that had to be renewed

The user's question about the vanguard — whether it justified itself by a permanent emergency or by an unfinished task — has an answer here, and it is both, in sequence.

The doctrinal position was that the vanguard's necessity was temporary and developmental. A backward country could pass to socialism without traversing capitalism, but only if a party assumed the leading role that a proletariat would otherwise have played, and only until the material and technical base of socialism had been constructed. The claim therefore contained, in principle, its own termination condition.

Watch what happened to that condition. The 1960 constitution, adopted on 6 July, marked the point at which socialism was declared built — collectivisation completed in 1959, the class enemy gone, the transition accomplished — and the same document enshrined the party's vanguard role. What replaced the completed task was a further task: the construction of the ma-

terial and technical base of socialism, an object with no definable finishing line, pursued through five-year plans into the 1980s.

And running alongside it, continuously, was the security emergency, which was renewed twice. Japanese spies and provocateurs from 1937 through the war. Then, from the early 1960s, China — a real border dispute, a real Sino-Soviet split, real Chinese claims on Mongolian territory, and Mao telling a Japanese delegation things that Mongolians could reasonably read as irredentist, so that Mongolian anxiety about China was not manufactured and does not need to be treated as manufactured. What is analytically interesting is that the two justifications were never in competition. The unfinished developmental task explained why the party must lead; the external threat explained why nobody could be permitted to disagree about how. Together they cover the whole field, and neither ever ran out.

What could not be annulled

There was one measurement in Mongolia that the apparatus could not touch, and it is instructive precisely because everything else was touchable.

The national herd stood at about 20 million head in 1945, after the wartime levies in kind. It stood at between 20 and 24 million in every subsequent year until 1990. Forty-five years, through collectivisation, through the fodder programme, through the veterinary service, through five-year plans that all specified growth — and the country’s principal productive asset did not increase. After privatisation it went to 33 million by 1999, to 43 million by 2008, and past 70 million by 2022. Whatever one concludes about the causes, and the causes are contested and include the removal of herd-size restrictions and the cashmere market, the socialist-period number is a flat line for the entire socialist period.

That number could not be annulled, and the reason is worth stating as a general proposition. **A measurement can be annulled where the population depends on the state to make it. It cannot be annulled where every household independently produces its own copy.** A census of nationalities can be declared improperly conducted, because no family counts the nation. Every Mongolian family counted its own animals, every autumn, because its life depended on the number; and a herdsman who is told that the herd grew by a quarter is not in the position of a citizen being told an aggregate — he is in the position of a man being told something about his own corral.

So the state did not try to annul it. It managed it in the ordinary ways: plan targets set and quietly missed, the shortfall attributed to weather, to the dzud, to insufficient effort, to the objective difficulty of pastoral conditions. All of which were partly true. But the flat line stood in the published statistics for forty-five years, in the country whose whole economy it was, and everybody could see it.

The framework should register that as a limit on the annulment operation rather than as an exception to it: **annulment works on measurements the state monopolises, and its reach ends exactly where private verification begins.** Which is another way of saying what the formation module found from a different direction — that the household is the one unit an information order cannot garrison.

Fifty years of not counting the dead

The last instrument in the module is the simplest and the largest.

Between twenty and forty thousand people were killed in eighteen months in 1937 to 1939. For half a century afterwards there was no public accounting: the dead were not named, the graves were not marked, the archives were not opened, public discussion was discouraged or condemned, and Tsedenbal suc-

cessfully obstructed the de-Stalinisation that in the Soviet Union itself opened part of the file. Families were told nothing, or were told sentences of ten or twenty-five years without right of correspondence, which was the formula for a man already shot.

This is not annulment. It is not censorship in the ordinary sense either, since censorship implies a fact circulating and being stopped. It is the simplest operation available to an order that controls every channel: the thing is not put into any of them, and no rival channel exists to put it into. Mass graves near Mörön were found in 1991 and at Khambyn Ovoo in Ulaanbaatar in 2003 — that is, the country learned the location of its own dead after the order that produced them had gone, and in one case a decade after.

What happened when it did become sayable is the module's closing evidence about what the silence had been for. The tenth of September, the date of the first arrests in 1937, was declared a day of remembrance. A memorial went up in front of the history museum. A compensation law reached its first reading. And in 1997, sixty years on, the leader of the former ruling party's parliamentary faction saw no reason for it to apologise, on the ground that it is senseless to blame present people for the mistakes of past history. Which is a defensible position about personal guilt, and it is also the last move of an information order: having been unable to prevent the facts from arriving, it disputes their address.

Reading information against the framework

Two things go back to the card, one of them confirming an addition already made and one of them new.

The confirmation is straightforward. **The annulment mechanism is present here in its general form and its signature is the substitution of a personnel finding for an epistemic one.** Mongolia supplies three instances across twenty-seven years, on three unrelated objects, with the same sentence and a

rotating foreign power. The instances also show the operation's *decay curve*, which is useful: in 1937 the disposal was execution, in 1962 exile and eventual murder, in 1964 twenty-five years in the countryside ending in rehabilitation and back wages. The mechanism survived the terror by decades and remained the standard disposal long after the killing stopped, which suggests it is a property of the doctrine's relation to error rather than of any particular level of violence. And the case establishes the mechanism's outer limit: it cannot reach a quantity that every household independently measures.

The new item concerns concealment, and it is the module's contribution.

Where a fact is too large to conceal, an order conceals its instrument instead — and this is a third operation, distinct from censorship and from annulment, cheaper than either, and available precisely where the other two are not.

Censorship concedes the fact and forbids its circulation. Annulment denies that the fact was a fact. Instrument-concealment concedes the fact, permits it to circulate, and hides the *document that authorises it*. Fifty to seventy-five thousand foreign soldiers, five divisions, missile bases and 1,800 tanks in a country of under two million were beyond concealing and beyond denying; the order therefore did neither, and made secret only the agreement of 4 March 1967 — an agreement whose own text, on the Mongolian account, required both parties to keep it secret.

The effect is exact and it is not a lesser effect than censorship. A population that knows a fact but not its authorisation can register the fact and cannot convert it into a demand, because a demand requires knowing whose signature is on what, for how long, and subject to what termination. **Censorship deprives people of a fact. Instrument-concealment deprives them of standing.**

Three consequences for the collection.

First, the diagnostic. When a study finds an unconcealable fact sitting in plain view inside an order with an otherwise formidable information apparatus, the question is not whether the censor failed. The question is where the paper went. Look for the published treaty with the permissive clause and the unpublished protocol beneath it; that pairing is the signature, and this study has now seen it once with a self-referential confidentiality provision attached.

Second, this confirms the prediction the robe module made and should be recorded as a confirmation rather than a fresh observation. That module argued that where a legitimating claim is substantially true, an order's prohibitions will cluster around the claim's strongest point rather than its weakest, because a true claim licenses the audience to reason from it. The claim here was national independence. The single most tightly held document in the country turns out to have been the one specifying the terms on which foreign divisions stood on its soil — which is to say, the one document bearing directly on whether the claim was true. The prediction was made in the previous module and the evidence for it was found in this one.

Third, and this is the thing to carry forward, the case shows an information order whose most consequential silence was not about anything the order had done. It was about a *word*. The censorship of events — the dead, the trials, the graves — was severe and it ended in 1990 with the events all coming out at once. The absence of a vocabulary in which the relationship could be described lasted longer and did more work, and it is still doing some, because the terms now used to describe those seventy years were all imported from outside the system after it collapsed and are all contested for that reason. **An order that forbids a fact must maintain the prohibition. An order that never supplies a word is not maintaining anything, and the gap it leaves outlives it.**

A note on sources.

Quoted directly and briefly: the Mongolian defence minister Lkhagvasüren's characterisation of Soviet aid as fraternal and disinterested, in his address on the forty-seventh anniversary of the Mongolian People's Army in May 1968, from the Library of Congress country study of Mongolia (1989), which is quoting Mongolian press of the time at one remove. Nambaryn Enkhbayar's position in 1997 that it is senseless to blame past history's mistakes on the present party is quoted at one remove from Christopher Kaplonski, "Blame, Guilt and Avoidance: The Struggle to Control the Past in Post-Socialist Mongolia" (*History and Memory*, 1999), which is the standing scholarly treatment of this subject and which I have read only in its opening pages through Project MUSE; anyone working on the post-socialist memory politics should go to it directly.

The 1967 stationing agreement — signed at Ulaanbaatar on 4 March 1967 by Lkhagvasüren for Mongolia and by the commander of the Transbaikal military district for the USSR, secret, and containing a mutual confidentiality provision — is reported in the Mongolian popular-historical literature and I have not seen the text or a scholarly citation of it. The module's central argument leans on this document, so the limitation is a real one and is stated rather than buried: what is separately and reliably attested is that the January 1966 Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance was public, contained a clause permitting the stationing of Soviet troops, and carried unpublished defence-related agreements alongside it. The self-referential secrecy clause is the detail that should be verified before it is relied upon.

Troop figures: about 75,000 by 1985 in two tank and three motorised rifle divisions, per the Library of Congress country study; about 50,000 in four divisions on Western estimates reported in 1989; 1,800 tanks and 320 aircraft and helicopters per RFE/RL's retrospective. These are Western intelligence estim-

ates made during a confrontation and should be read as orders of magnitude. The withdrawal chronology — announced at Vladivostok in July 1986, partial from 1987, completed in December 1992 — follows the scholarly treatment in the *Journal of Slavic Military Studies*, whose finding that the decision was Moscow's and that the Mongolians went along reluctantly for fear of being left exposed to China is the source for that characterisation here.

The 1964 plenum is drawn from the Wilson Center working paper and the *Journal of Cold War Studies* article on Mongolian politics and the Sino-Soviet split, both by Sergey Radchenko, who worked from the plenum speeches and Soviet archival material; the finding that the challengers spoke mainly about corruption and incompetence, that they barely touched foreign policy, that only Lookhuuz criticised over-reliance on Moscow, and that Tsedenbal recast the affair as a pro-Chinese coup which Moscow then endorsed, is his. I have read the abstract and the searchable portions of the working paper rather than the full article. Lookhuuz's biography — head of the Chief Directorate of State Farms 1956–62, exile by Council of Ministers decree in January 1965, shepherd and pig farmer at Kharkhorin 1965–76, imprisonment at Züünkharaa, rehabilitation and twenty-five years' back wages in 1990, election to the Great Khural in July 1990 — rests on Alan J. K. Sanders's *Historical Dictionary of Mongolia*.

The 1937 and 1962 episodes repeat material sourced in earlier modules of this study: Order 366 and the Extraordinary Plenipotentiary Commission from Kaplonski and the reference literature; the Tömör-Ochir affair from the reference literature and Mongolian popular history, with Weatherford the usual English source for the manner of his death.

Contested figures. The livestock series — about 20 million in 1945, 20 to 24 million through to 1990, 33 million in 1999, 43 million in 2008, a peak of 71.1 million in 2022 and 58.1 million in 2025 — comes from the Library of Congress study for the so-

cialist period and the Mongolian National Statistics Office thereafter. The socialist-era figures were produced by the state whose plans they measure, which cuts against the module's use of them and is the reason the module makes the narrower argument it makes: not that the figures are true, but that they are flat, published, and were checkable by every household in the country. The observation that herd-size restrictions were lifted at the transition is from the ecological literature and complicates any simple reading of the post-1990 increase. The repression totals are as given in Module 1.

Two cautions. The claim that this order lacked a vocabulary for its own central relationship is an argument rather than a finding, and it is the kind of argument that is easy to make and hard to falsify; the evidence offered for it is the absence of the term in the period sources and its immediate appearance after 1990, which is suggestive and not conclusive. And Mongolian anxiety about China in this period was not manufactured — the border dispute, the Sino-Soviet split and Chinese statements about Mongolian territory were real — so the module's argument that a foreign hand was the standard disposal for domestic criticism should not be read as a claim that there was never a foreign hand. The point is narrower: that the finding arrived in the same form every time, whoever the foreigner was.

Module Eight

HIS SUBJECT WAS SCIENTIFIC COMMUNISM

Module 8 · Elite Coordination and the Default — how an arrangement holds the people inside it when none of them owns anything; a hierarchy in which every position was a grant and every grant revocable from another country; sixty-two years of removals in which the sentence never changed and the penalty steadily fell; and the moment in 1991 when a settlement that had given its elite no property finally paid out

A case study in the Patterns of Power series · Thomas J. Bryan with Claude (Anthropic) · held as tested, not revealed

The question, put precisely

The man at the bottom has already been accounted for. He was priced: a fodder reserve against the winter that would ruin him, a school, a clinic, a wage and a pension, against a floor of force whose credibility had been established beyond argument in eighteen months of 1937, and an exit that stood physically open and was economically shut. That ledger has been read and it comes out, for most men in most years, against rising.

This module asks the other question, which is the harder one and where the interesting variance in any order actually lives. Above the priced man sits an arrangement, and that arrangement is held together by people — thousands of them, in offices, with different jobs and different interests, who did not all like each other and frequently did not agree. Nothing about a floor of force explains why *they* hold. A minister is not deterred by a policeman.

The proposition this collection works from is that they hold not because they conspire and not because they share a belief, but because each of them, defending his own position for the most ordinary reasons, defends the whole arrangement by default — the two being welded together so that a man minding his own business reproduces the order as a by-product. Where that welding is tight, the order is stable without anyone directing it. Where it is loose, positions can be defended *against* the arrangement, and the order fractures.

So: how tightly was it welded here, what was each position actually made of, and what happened to the men who tried to hold a position and a disagreement at the same time.

The seats

You cannot run a ledger on positions without knowing what the positions were, so they should be set out plainly.

Formally the highest body was the Party Congress, meeting every five years. Between congresses the Central Committee was highest, but it met about once a year, so the real work sat in two bodies elected by it. The **Politburo** — in May 1986, seven full members and three candidates — set policy and evaluated national programmes. The **Secretariat** ran the apparatus, and held the function that matters most for this module: *nomenklatura*, the authority to appoint to the key posts in both the party and the government bureaucracies.

That word is the hinge of the whole structure and it should be understood concretely rather than as jargon. A nomenklatura is a list of jobs, and a corresponding list of the people eligible to hold them. Every consequential post in the country — minister, deputy minister, aimag first secretary, factory director, negdel chairman, newspaper editor, university rector, ambassador, general — was on somebody's list, and no one reached it except by being placed on the list of eligibles first. Below the centre the same structure repeated: eighteen aimags and three municipal-

ities, each with a party committee, and beneath them the sums, each with its own organisation directing the local assembly, the cooperative and the administration. The chairman of a negdel was commonly also the head of the sum.

The state ran in parallel and beneath: a Council of Ministers, a People's Great Khural whose deputies were elected in single-candidate contests, and from 1972 an arrangement in which the head of the party also held the headship of state.

And around all of it, at every level, sat Soviet advisers and specialists — in the ministries, in the security organs, at Erdenet, in the army — whose formal status was technical assistance and whose informal weight, on the evidence of what happened whenever a Mongolian leader diverged, was considerable.

What a position was made of, and what it was not

Now the ledger. What did a man in one of these seats actually hold?

He held an appointment. Attached to it: a salary, a ration entitlement, an apartment in a country with an acute housing shortage, in some cases a car and a driver, access to closed shops, the possibility of foreign travel, medical care of a quality unavailable to others, and — the item that mattered most to most of them — a university place for his children, in Ulaanbaatar or in Moscow or Prague or Leipzig.

What he did not hold is the whole finding.

He held no land, because there was none to hold. He held no enterprise, no share, no rent, no title deed. There was no family estate, no entailed property, no patrimony to retire to. Nothing he had was heritable: his children inherited his *classification* and his connections, which are real assets, but not one hectare or one animal. And every item on the list above was attached to the post rather than to the man, so that it left with the post.

Set that against the co-opted aristocracies this collection has documented elsewhere. A conqueror who confirms a nobleman in his estates has bought his compliance with a thing the nobleman now owns; the transaction binds, but it also creates a base. A duke who falls out with a king retires to his county and is still a duke with rents and armed tenants; he has somewhere to be. That base is the structural condition for aristocratic resistance, for baronial leagues, for the whole repertoire of elite defiance that fills the medieval and early modern record.

The Mongolian party official had no county. He had a desk, and the desk belonged to the list, and the list was administered by the Secretariat, and the Secretariat's own composition was subject to a view taken in Moscow. **A man in that position who loses it does not descend to a lower station. He ceases to have a station at all** — and his wife's job, his flat, and his children's education go with him, which is the part that does the disciplinary work, because a man may gamble himself and will not usually gamble his children.

The addendum this study runs on predicts the counter-intuitive consequence and the case bears it out: this makes the default *stronger* rather than weaker. The aristocracy that owns things can defend its property against the crown. An elite that owns nothing can defend nothing against anything, and its only asset is the continued existence of the arrangement that issues its position. The welding is therefore not merely tight; it is total. There is no conceivable configuration in which defending one's own position and defending the order come apart.

The channel

How did a man get onto the list? The route is remarkably uniform and it can be read off a single biography.

Punsalmaagiin Ochirbat was born in 1942 in Zavkhan, a herder's country in the west; his father died when he was five and he took his mother's name. He went to school in Ulaanbaatar

from 1951, then to the Mining Institute at Leningrad, graduating in 1965. He returned, joined the party in the same year, and went to work as a specialist in the Ministry of Industry. Chief engineer at the Sharyn Gol coal mine in 1967. Deputy Minister of Fuel, Energy and Geology in 1972. Minister in 1976, and in the same year a deputy of the People's Great Khural and a member of the MPRP Central Committee. Chairman of the State Commission for Foreign Economic Relations in 1985; Minister of Foreign Economic Relations and Supply from 1987.

Every element of that is the structure working as designed. A boy from a poor rural family — the *ard* classification that Module 2 found had become the most valuable status in the country — is educated at Soviet expense in the metropole, in a technical discipline the plan requires; he joins the party at the moment he enters professional life, because the two are the same act; he rises through the ministries that administer the country's mineral wealth, which is the sector where the whole external relationship is transacted; and he arrives on the Central Committee at thirty-four.

The scale of the channel is the thing to hold. Tens of thousands of Mongolians were educated in the USSR and Eastern Europe across the socialist decades, in a country of one to two million. That is not a scholarship programme; it is a national elite formation system located outside the national territory, and it produced almost every person who ran Mongolia for fifty years — and, as will emerge, almost every person who overthrew that arrangement as well.

There is one more feature worth naming because it inverts the colonial pattern. In the European colonies this collection has studied, formation was withheld and there was a ceiling: a Vietnamese or a Nigerian could rise to a certain grade and no further, because above that grade sat Frenchmen and Englishmen. **Here there was no ethnic ceiling at all.** Every office in Mongolia was held by a Mongolian: the ministries, the army, the se-

curity organs, the academy, the mine directorships. No Russian was minister of anything in Ulaanbaatar.

The ceiling was of a different kind, and locating it exactly is the module's next task.

What happened to men who developed a position of their own

The list is long enough to be a series rather than a set of incidents, and reading it in order shows a mechanism that never changed while its penalty steadily fell.

Dogsomyn Bodoo, the lama who was the first prime minister, executed August 1922. **Soliin Danzan**, who had brought him down, shot at the Third Party Congress in August 1924. **Peljidiin Genden**, prime minister, who told Stalin he would not fight religion and refused a demand about the lamas, removed March 1936, shot in Moscow November 1937. **Marshal Demid**, army commander, dead on a train in August 1937 of recorded food poisoning at thirty-six. **Anandyn Amar**, prime minister, removed 1939 and shot in the USSR in 1941. **Dashiin Damba**, party first secretary, removed 1958-59. **Daramyn Tömör-Ochir**, removed September 1962 over the Chinggis commemoration, exiled, killed with an axe in 1985. **Luvsantserengiin Tsend**, removed 1963. The **Lookhuuz–Nyambuu–Surmaajav group**, December 1964: recast as a pro-Chinese conspiracy, exiled twenty-five years by decree of the Council of Ministers, rehabilitated 1990 with back wages.

And then, in August 1984, **Yumjaagiin Tsedenbal himself** — general secretary for forty-four years, head of state, the man who had removed all the others — was removed while in Moscow, on the initiative of the Soviet leadership under Chernenko, on grounds given as age and mental capacity. He never returned to live in Mongolia and died in Moscow in 1991.

Two observations follow and both matter.

The first is that the ceiling in this hierarchy was not on *rank*. It was on *independence*. A Mongolian could hold every office his country possessed, up to and including the headship of party and state, for forty-four years — and could still be removed by a decision taken in another capital, without a vote, without a charge, and without any Mongolian institution having a say. The office was not the limit. The office was itself a position on somebody else's list.

The second is that the *disposal mechanism* is identical across sixty-two years while the penalty declines almost monotonically: execution, execution, execution, poisoning, execution, dismissal, exile-then-murder, dismissal, twenty-five years' exile, retirement in Moscow. Whatever the substantive disagreement — religion, the pace of collectivisation, a national anniversary, corruption in the leadership, senescence — the resolution was always the removal of a person, and the charge was always, in some form, an allegiance problem. This is the same operation the information module found: an epistemic or political dispute converted into a personnel finding. Here it can be seen from the elite's side, and from that side its function is obvious. **A hierarchy in which disagreement is disposed of by removing the disagreeing man teaches every remaining man that a position and an opinion cannot be held simultaneously, and it teaches this without anyone having to say it.**

Why nobody defected

The framework's sharpest question about a default is not why men supported the order but why the dissatisfied ones did not defect, and here the answer is unusually complete.

They had nowhere to go.

There was no rival patron. In a normal elite politics a losing faction seeks another sponsor — a rival court, a foreign power, a church, a provincial base. Every one of those was closed. China was the enemy, and after 1960 courting it was the standing cap-

ital charge, which meant that the one available foreign alternative was also the one accusation that would destroy you fastest; this is why the 1964 group's complaint about corruption at home was so easily recast as a Chinese plot, and why Moscow accepted the recasting. The Buddhist establishment, which in any earlier century would have been the natural refuge for a nobleman out of favour, had been destroyed in 1937. There was no private economy to retire into, because there was no private economy. There was no emigration, because a Mongolian could not travel without permission and the only country he could reach without a visa was the one whose approval had removed him. And there was no province to withdraw to, since the aimag first secretary held his post on the same list.

The comparison with the aristocratic default is exact and it runs the other way from the intuition. A landed elite's default is *loose*, because each member has an independent base and can therefore hold a position while opposing the arrangement — which is where baronial revolts and constitutional charters come from. **An appointed elite's default is airtight, because there is no configuration in which a member's position survives the arrangement's defeat.** The Mongolian party did not need a cabal, did not need to coordinate, and — this is the tell — did not need to watch its own members very hard after 1939, because the arithmetic did the work. What looked from outside like remarkable discipline was a large number of separate men each correctly reading a ledger with one entry in it.

The reversal of 1932, revisited

An earlier module left a question open and this is where it can be answered, at least in the form of a proposition.

In 1929 to 1932 Mongolia collectivised a nomadic pastoral economy, lost seven million animals, met a seven-month armed rising — and then reversed. The collectives were dissolved, the animals returned, the lamas allowed back. In precisely the same

years the Soviet Union collectivised another nomadic pastoral people inside its own borders, the Kazakhs, and did not reverse; something on the order of forty per cent of the Kazakh population died.

The difference this module can offer is structural rather than moral, and it concerns where an error could be *put*.

Kazakhstan was an autonomous republic administered from Moscow. An admission that the policy there had failed was an admission about Soviet policy, made by the men who had authored it, with no intervening layer to absorb it. Mongolia was a nominally sovereign state with its own party, its own politburo, its own government and its own leftist faction. The Comintern could therefore find that the *Mongolian* leadership had proceeded too fast, expel Shijee, Badrakh and Prime Minister Jigjidjav, restore the animals, and emerge with the doctrine intact and no Soviet officer having been wrong about anything.

A separate national hierarchy gives an apex something a directly administered province cannot: a layer of officials who can be found to have erred without the apex having erred. That is a real function of the sovereignty this study has already found so expensive, and it should be added to the ledger of what the concession bought. The buffer bought a witness to the claim of independence, as the robe module argued; it also bought an absorbent layer for policy failure. Both are returns that appear nowhere in a trade balance.

This is offered as a proposition rather than a demonstration. The counter-argument — that the Mongolian reversal happened because the rising was militarily serious and the Kazakh resistance was not, and that no structural explanation is needed — is available and is not refuted here.

1991, and what the positions were worth

The addendum sets a test at the end of this module which no other case in the collection offers so cleanly. If the same men

held power under a new flag, with a new legitimating claim, in the same buildings, then the default was a structure of positions rather than a set of beliefs — and the ideology's evaporation without a corresponding change in who held what is the strongest evidence the framework will ever get for that proposition.

The test returns an answer, and the answer is not ambiguous.

Begin with the men who overthrew it. Sanjaasürengiin Zorig, the central figure of the December 1989 demonstrations and the March 1990 hunger strike, was born in 1962 to a Buryat professor at the Mongolian State University and an actress; he attended School No. 23 in Ulaanbaatar, one of the city's Russian-language schools; he studied at Lomonosov Moscow State University from 1980 to 1985. His sister Oyun — who studied geology at Charles University in Prague from 1981 and later took a Cambridge doctorate — has said with some amusement that his subject at Moscow was *nauchny kommunizm*, scientific communism. On graduating he worked as an instructor for the Mongolian Revolutionary Youth League, then lectured at the National University. She describes their cohort as hundreds of young people from privileged Mongolian families sent to study in the USSR and Eastern Europe in the 1980s.

The scholarship on the period says the same thing in general terms: the democratic movement was made by younger and more junior members of the party-state elite, calling for the intensification of Mongolia's own versions of glasnost and perestroika. This was not an insurgency from outside the arrangement. It was a movement of people the arrangement had formed, educated at its expense, in its metropole, in its own doctrine.

Then the man at the top. Ochirbat, minister of foreign economic relations, was made chairman of the Presidium of the People's Great Khural in March 1990 as the Politburo fell, and in September 1990 became President — nominated by the MPRP, and backed in the indirect vote by the opposition Social Demo-

crats and National Progress Party, at 88.1 per cent. In 1993 the MPRP declined to renominate him, so he stood in the country's first direct presidential election as the candidate of the *democratic* opposition, and won. The same man, in the same office, endorsed by the communists in 1990 and by the anti-communists in 1993. He left office in 1997, sat on the Constitutional Court from 2005 to 2016, and in the meantime became a business executive.

His prime minister from September 1990, Dashiin Byambasüren, was a Moscow Higher School of Economics graduate who was in the MPRP until 1992 and then in the Democratic Renaissance Party.

Then the party. It won 343 of 430 seats in July 1990 on a 97.9 per cent turnout, 70 of 76 in 1992, lost in 1996, and returned in 2000. It changed its name, dropped Marxism-Leninism, joined the Socialist International in 2003, and has governed for most of the period since. It is currently the largest party in the country.

Then the property. This is the part that completes the argument. The state owned everything, and between 1991 and 1996 essentially all of it was transferred to private hands: the herds, the housing, some four thousand enterprises, through voucher schemes and small-scale sales. The anthropological and political-economy literature on this is consistent and unflattering. Privatisation in agriculture favoured existing management and insiders. The dissolution of the negdels allowed particular people to acquire the collectives' trucks, equipment and animals. David Sneath, the standing authority, records that the most widely felt public grievance in Mongolia is that privatisation was unfair or dishonest, and finds it hard now to credit that it was ever meant to benefit the public at large; he puts the ownership of Mongolian business, by 2018, at about thirty families, with Mongolian reporting that some 99.6 per cent of the shares on the country's stock exchange are held by around five per cent of shareholders. The head of the country's principal polling organ-

isation calls the successor party a band of apparatchiks who became oligarchs.

And the flagship asset closed the circle in 2016, when the Russian state corporation's 49 per cent of Erdenet — the mine built with Soviet capital whose copper had left at below-market prices — was bought by a private Mongolian company in a transaction that became a national scandal over who was behind it and where the money came from.

Reading the default against the framework

The addendum's prediction is confirmed and needs no restatement: the appointed elite's default was stronger than any landed elite's in this collection, because no member had an independent base from which a dissent could be sustained. The evidence is the sixty-two-year removal series in which not one removed man ever mounted a resistance, and the absence, throughout, of anything resembling a faction with a territory.

The contribution this module makes is about what happened next, and it changes how the collection should read the settlement module in every case of this kind.

A settlement that grants its elite no property has not abolished the elite's property. It has deferred it — and the deferred grant is collected at the dissolution.

Follow the logic through. In an ordinary order, a position is a *claim on* assets: the office yields rents, and the officeholder owns things besides. In this order the position was not a claim on assets; it was **the sole means of access to assets**, because there were no assets outside the state and no way to reach them except through a post. For seventy years that arrangement looked like the maximum possible subordination of an elite, and it was: nothing owned, everything revocable, the family liable.

Then the state dissolved and its entire holdings — mines, factories, buildings, vehicles, herds, apartments — had to be converted into private property in the space of about four years,

by people who possessed the information about what each asset was worth, the authority to structure the transfer, and the relationships to execute it. There was exactly one group in Mongolia with all three, and it was the group the settlement had spent seventy years assuring that it owned nothing.

So the thing that had made the default airtight is the same thing that made the conversion inevitable. **An elite defined purely by position converts, at privatisation, directly into an elite defined by property — and it does so faster and more completely than a landed elite could, because there is no competing claimant with a prior title.** In a post-feudal transition, dispossessed former owners come back with deeds. Here there were no deeds and no former owners, because the naming law and the confiscations of the 1920s had erased both. The field was clear, and the only people standing on it were the ones holding the lists.

Three consequences for the collection.

First, the diagnostic for this module changes. Asking whether an elite owns property tells you how tightly the default binds *while the order stands*. It tells you nothing about durability, and it may point exactly the wrong way. Where the elite owns nothing, expect the default to hold to the last day and then to survive the order's death by conversion — and expect the resulting distribution of property to be narrower, not broader, than in a case where property was already dispersed.

Second, this supplies the missing half of the settlement finding. Module 2 established that the only property grant this order ever made was paid to monks for leaving their monasteries, and that the elite received nothing heritable. That looked at the time like an order which had solved the elite problem by refusing to pay. It had not refused. It had written a promissory note, and the note was presented in 1992.

Third, and this is the finding to carry into the collapse module, the ideology's evaporation changed almost nothing about who held what, and the men who dismantled the arrangement were

the arrangement's own most successful products. The leader of the democratic revolution held a Moscow degree in scientific communism and had been a Youth League instructor. The first president of democratic Mongolia had joined the party in 1965 and sat on its Central Committee from 1976. **A doctrine that disappears without disturbing the distribution of positions was not what was holding the positions in place** — which is precisely what this collection has argued about the powerful in general, and here it can be observed rather than inferred, because the doctrine was removed under laboratory conditions and the structure was measured before and after.

It should be said plainly, since the finding is unflattering and could be mistaken for a sneer, that this is not an accusation against the men in question. Zorig, who questioned the fairness of the market reforms after his own side came to power and was murdered in 1998 in a case still unsolved, was by every account a man of unusual integrity. The point is not about hearts. It is that the arrangement had made itself the only route to everything a capable Mongolian could want — education, work, standing, the ability to act on the world — so that even the people who came to detest it had been made by it, and even the people who destroyed it inherited it. That is not a failure of character. It is what a total default looks like from the inside, and it is the strongest possible demonstration that position and not belief is the load-bearing thing.

A note on sources.

Quoted briefly: Sanjaasürengiin Oyun's remark that her brother's subject at Moscow State University was, funnily enough, scientific communism, from RFE/RL's 2010 retrospective on Mongolian democracy; and the political scientist Sumati Luvsandendev of the Sant Maral Foundation describing the successor party as apparatchiks who became oligarchs, from Eurasianet's reporting on Mongolian business and politics. David

Sneath's findings — that the fairness of privatisation is the most widely felt public grievance in Mongolia, that it is now hard to credit it was meant to benefit the public as a whole, that Mongolian business ownership is concentrated in around thirty families, and that some 99.6 per cent of stock-exchange shares are held by about five per cent of shareholders — are paraphrased from his *Mongolia Remade* (2018) as summarised in the *Pacific Affairs* review and as cited in a Cambridge doctoral thesis on post-socialist Mongolian elites. I have not read Sneath's book directly and it is the authority on this module's closing argument, which is a real limitation.

The institutional structure — Party Congress every five years, Central Committee meeting about annually, a Politburo of seven full and three candidate members in May 1986, a Secretariat holding nomenklatura authority over appointments in both party and government, eighteen aimags and three municipalities each with a party committee, and the sum organisations beneath — is from the Library of Congress country study of Mongolia (1989), which is the fullest English description of the apparatus and was compiled while it was still running.

Ochirbat's career is assembled from the Mongolian government news agency's obituary (January 2025), Mongolian press, and the reference literature, which agree on the sequence: Leningrad Mining Institute to 1965, party membership 1965, Sharyn Gol chief engineer 1967, deputy minister 1972, minister and Central Committee member 1976, State Commission for Foreign Economic Relations 1985, minister 1987, Presidium chairman March 1990, president September 1990 at 88.1 per cent in the indirect vote with opposition backing, direct election 1993 as the Democratic Union candidate, defeated 1997. Zorig's biography — School No. 23, Moscow State University 1980–85, Youth League instructor, National University lecturer, elected to the People's Great Khural June 1990, minister for infrastructure 1998, murdered 2 October 1998 — is from the reference literature resting on Morris Rossabi's *Modern Mongolia* and on

Mongolian sources. I checked and could not substantiate a claim I had expected to find, that Zorig was descended from the Buryat Comintern agent Elbegdorj Rinchino; what is attested is that his father was a Buryat professor at the Mongolian State University, and the module says only that.

The removal series repeats material sourced in Modules 1 and 7 of this study: Bodoo and Chagdarjav 1922, Danzan 1924, Genden 1936–37, Demid 1937, Amar 1939–41 from Kaplonski and the reference literature; Damba 1958–59, Tömör-Ochir 1962, Tsend 1963 and the Lookhuuz group of December 1964 from Sanders's *Historical Dictionary of Mongolia* and from Sergey Radchenko's work on the 1964 plenum; Tsedenbal's removal in August 1984 on Soviet initiative under Chernenko from the reference literature.

Contested and thin. I have not found a reliable series for MPRP membership across the socialist period and have therefore not given one; the only compositional figure located is for 1947, when 4.7 per cent of members were classed as proletarians, 54.1 per cent as herders and 41.2 per cent as intellectuals, reported at one remove from Mongolian sources. Nor have I found a firm total for Mongolians educated in the USSR and Eastern Europe; the module says "tens of thousands," which is the order of magnitude the literature implies and is not a figure anyone should cite. The characterisation of the democratic movement as arising from junior members of the party-state elite is Marissa Smith's, in her 2020 article on regional networks of power in contemporary Mongolia, and is consistent with the biographies but is a scholarly judgement rather than a count. The Erdenet transaction of 2016 remains disputed in Mongolia and the module says only that it became a national scandal, which is not in dispute.

Two cautions. First, this module's closing argument — that a position-based elite converts directly into a property-based one at privatisation — is a structural claim, and structural claims of this kind are easy to make and hard to test against the alternat-

ive that the same outcome would have followed from any rapid privatisation regardless of who held the prior positions. The evidence offered is the insider-favouring character of the Mongolian transfers as reported in the scholarship, and the concentration of the result; a reader who thinks the concentration is sufficiently explained by shock therapy and weak institutions is not refuted here. Second, the post-1990 politics of who profited from privatisation is a live and bitter dispute in Mongolia, and the sources drawn on above — anthropologists, a pollster, foreign correspondents — are not neutral parties to it. Their account is the dominant one in the English-language literature and it is reported as such rather than as settled.

Module Nine

HOW MANY WOULD HAVE TO BE BOUGHT

Module 9 · Plurality or Foreclosure — a sovereign state with a constitution, a parliament, courts, a procuracy and a seat at the United Nations, in which not one of those things ever restrained anything; the outside that was defined by having relatives across a border; and the reason a country with none of the usual prerequisites wrote itself a constitution designed to be expensive to capture — together with what has been happening to it since the copper came

A case study in the Patterns of Power series · Thomas J. Bryan with Claude (Anthropic) · held as tested, not revealed

What is actually being tested

The question this module asks is not whether an order was cruel. It is narrower and more mechanical: were the three monopolies — organised violence, wealth, and the information a population trusts — held by one hand or by several, and was there any institution outside the apex with a share it could defend?

The proposition being tested is that liberty is a residue rather than a gift. Where several groups each hold a piece of the monopolies and none can destroy the others, each seeks protection against the rest, and the protections they extract from one another harden into rules that eventually apply to everybody: due process because a faction wanted its own men safe from arbitrary seizure, freedom of speech because a party wanted its own paper unclosable, property rules because one set of owners feared another. The liberties of the ordinary man are, on this reading, the by-product of powerful people fencing off each oth-

er. And where all three monopolies sit in one hand, no such fencing occurs and no residue forms — whatever the rhetoric says, and however sincere the rhetoric is.

Mongolia offers a test of that proposition sharper than any other case in this collection, for a reason peculiar to it. Most orders that foreclose plurality do not bother to build the institutions that would embody it. This one built all of them, in full, at great expense, for seventy years — and then, in 1992, built a different set. The same country, the same people, the same buildings. What changed was whether the institutions had anything to hold.

Everything on paper

The formal apparatus of separated power in the Mongolian People's Republic was not thin. It was more complete than that of any Soviet union republic, because Mongolia was not a union republic; it was a sovereign state.

It had three constitutions — 1924, 1940, 1960 — each with a chapter on the basic rights and duties of citizens. It had a legislature, the People's Great Khural, whose deputies were elected by universal adult suffrage. It had a Council of Ministers, a judiciary, a procuracy, an Academy of Sciences, a national university, a writers' union, a trade union federation, a youth league, and after 1944 a functioning Buddhist monastery. It had its own currency, its own army under its own marshal, its own foreign ministry, embassies abroad, and from 1961 a vote in the General Assembly of the United Nations equal to that of the United States.

Not one of those things ever restrained anything.

The legislature met rarely and ratified. The elections had one candidate. The courts convicted: of roughly twenty-six thousand persons prosecuted by the Extraordinary Plenipotentiary Commission in 1937 to 1939, on the Mongolian archivist's count, seven were found innocent. The constitutional rights chapters coexisted with the disenfranchisement of whole categories of

person, with the destruction of seven hundred monasteries, and with a general secretary who ordered a monument destroyed by telephone. The procuracy prosecuted whom it was given. The army's senior officers were killed almost to a man in 1937 — the estimates run to eighty or ninety per cent of the high command — on the eve of a war with Japan. The academy and the university were staffed from the same list as the ministries. The monastery had fifty-seven monks and its lamas were forbidden to officiate outside the walls.

And the sovereignty itself, which was real in international law and had been bought at enormous cost, restrained nothing either. The head of party and state could be, and in 1984 was, removed by a decision taken in Moscow.

This is the strongest available demonstration that institutional separateness on paper is not a variable that does any work on its own. Mongolia had more of it than Kazakhstan or Uzbekistan — a whole extra layer, an actual state — and Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan were not less free. The variable is not whether the institutions exist. It is whether any of them holds a piece of a monopoly that it could lose.

None of them did. The party held the violence, through an interior ministry a quarter of whose staff were NKVD officers. It held the wealth, absolutely, because after 1959 there was no private property of consequence in the country and the state was the sole employer, sole landlord, sole purchaser and sole creditor. And it held the trusted information: one party, one paper of record, one publisher, one broadcaster, one academy, a closed southern border from 1960, and no foreign signal anyone could receive.

Testing for a faction with a share

Before concluding foreclosure, the candidates should be checked individually, because an order can have a hidden counterweight.

The army. The most usual counterweight anywhere. Here it was destroyed as an independent body in 1937, when the commander died on a train and the officer corps was liquidated, and thereafter it was trained, equipped, doctrinally shaped and in wartime commanded by the Soviet Union. It never intervened in a Mongolian political dispute in seventy years, including in March 1990 when it might have.

The security organs. In some orders these become a faction. Here they were an instrument of the apex and, at the crucial moments, of the apex in another country: the lists in 1937 came from Frinovsky, and the men of highest rank were removed to the USSR to be tried by Soviet troikas.

The provinces. Eighteen aimags and three municipalities, each with a party committee — but every first secretary held his post on the Secretariat's nomenklatura, so a provincial base was a delegated position rather than an independent one. No aimag ever sustained a position against the centre.

The church. The one institution in Mongolian history that had ever held a genuinely independent share of wealth, learning and belief. Destroyed between 1937 and 1939, and reduced thereafter to a showpiece.

A national minority with a territory. Kazakhs were about four per cent of the population and heavily concentrated in the west. Bayan-Ölgii was created as an aimag in 1940, and Kazakh-language schools have operated since the 1940s. That is a real concession and it should be counted as one. But it was a concession administered from the centre, not a share held against it: the aimag was created by the state, the schools ran on the state's curriculum, and in the same decade Kazakh clan heads and intellectuals were being prosecuted, with a refugee movement into Xinjiang reported at the end of the 1930s. A recognised category is not a counterweight. It is a filing decision.

The answer is that there was no faction with a share. All three monopolies were in one hand, and the hand was ultimately guided from outside.

The inside and the outside

The module was asked whether there was an inside with liberties and an outside without them. There was, and its boundary is not where one would expect.

Party membership did not buy protection. It bought exposure. The people killed in 1937 to 1939 were disproportionately the order's own: thirty-six of the fifty-one members of the central committee, two former prime ministers, the army command, the intelligentsia. A herdsman in a remote sum was in less danger in those eighteen months than a departmental head in the capital. This inverts the usual colonial arrangement, in which the inside group holds rights and the outside group holds none, and it follows from what the previous module established — that the members of this hierarchy owned nothing and therefore had nothing to interpose between themselves and a decision.

The genuine outside was defined by two criteria, and both were categorical rather than behavioural.

The first was the class classification of 1924. Article Thirty-Five of the first constitution removed the franchise from former title-holders, clergy, resident monks, those living on profit or on the labour of others, and traders and moneylenders, and placed them in the same schedule as persons judged mentally incapable. That is an outside created by a legal instrument, filled by a criterion the state wrote, and inherited by descent.

The second was more specific to this case and worth naming carefully. **The reliable way to be on the outside in Mongolia was to have kin across a border.**

In the spring of 1933 the party's general secretary, Jambyn Lkhümbe — the man who a year earlier had led the suppression of the Khövsgöl rising and burned Rashaant — was arrested on the strength of a letter forged by a junior functionary, and accused of heading a Japanese ring intending to turn Mongolia into a protectorate. The affair that followed implicated, on the figures usually given, over fifteen hundred people, of whom fifty-

six were executed; other accounts count 317 repressed across three regional groups with fifty-three executions. It fell with particular weight on Buryat-Mongols. Lkhümbe was convicted on 25 June 1934 and shot five days later. The whole business is generally read as the rehearsal for 1937.

The Buryats' offence was structural. They were Mongols who were Soviet subjects or descendants of them, some of them refugees from the Soviet collectivisation and the Buryat rising of 1929, and their cross-border kinship made them presumptively available to a foreign hand. Kazakhs, whose kin were across a different border, occupied the same position for the same reason. And Genden, when he was finally destroyed in 1937, was made the head of a fabricated Buryat pan-Mongolist and pro-Japanese organisation linked to the Soviet ambassador and to Tukhachevsky.

That is the mirror image of what the information module found. There, the standard disposal for a domestic problem was to attribute it to a foreign power. Here, the standard criterion for being outside the protection of the order was to have a plausible connection to one. The two are the same instrument used from opposite ends, and together they define an order whose only recognised axis of danger ran outward.

Where the plurality came from

Now the question the module exists to answer. The monopoly did break, in 1990, and the question is what broke it — because on the residue theory it ought to have been broken by factions inside prising it apart, and it was not.

Nothing inside had a share to prise with. What actually happened is this. In December 1989 students began demonstrating. On 7 March 1990 about ten people began a hunger strike in Sükhbaatar Square wearing traditional clothing that had been discouraged. Crowds reached tens of thousands. A decree authorising a crackdown was drafted and put in front of the gener-

al secretary, Jambyn Batmönkh, who by the recollection of those present refused to sign it and held to a line that force was never to be used. The Politburo dissolved itself and resigned rather than clear the square. On 21 March the clause naming the party as the guiding force of society and Marxism-Leninism as its instrument was struck from the constitution. Free elections were called and held in July.

Two things about that sequence bear on the theory.

The first is that the enabling condition was external. Gorbachev had made it clear that Soviet armour would not be used to keep fraternal parties in power, and the Soviet divisions were in the middle of a withdrawal decided in Moscow in 1986. Without that, March 1990 in Ulaanbaatar would have been a different month.

The second is that the internal condition was one man's decision, in a system that had spent seventy years ensuring that decisions of that kind rested with one man. **The plurality was not extracted. It was released** — by the holder of the monopoly, under pressure, at a moment when he had good reason to believe he would not be backed if he used force. That is not the residue mechanism. That is an unforced concession by an apex whose external guarantor had withdrawn.

What was built, and why

And then, in the two years following, the residue mechanism did operate — and the record of *why* is unusually explicit, because the men who did it explained themselves, and because a political scientist went to Ulaanbaatar in 1998 and asked them.

The constitution ratified in January 1992 established a parliament-heavy semi-presidentialism: a strong legislature, and a president with real powers — including the power to reject candidates for prime minister — but nowhere near enough to govern alone. Steven Fish's account of the drafting, based on interviews with the participants and on the Mongolian constitutional

literature, finds that the debate was raucous and contentious, and that the settlement on a dispersed design reflected a specific and stated concern: to multiply “the number of persons who would have to be bought off” for Mongolia to be returned to foreign control.

That sentence is the module.

Note what it is not. It is not a claim about the value of liberty, and the drafters were not primarily thinking about the rights of the Mongolian citizen. It is a calculation about *price*. A country whose power is concentrated in one office can be captured by capturing one man — and Mongolians, Fish reports, tended to remember their own communist period not as a party dictatorship of the Soviet type but as a single-man dictatorship run by a puppet of a foreign state. Two men had ruled from 1928 to 1984. Tsedenbal had lived in a mansion in the centre of the capital and had been removed by a decision in Moscow. On that reading, concentrated power *was* the mechanism of foreign control, and dispersing it was not a concession to liberalism but a defence of independence. The two projects were the same project.

So the protections were built. And they worked, on the evidence of the following twenty-five years: repeated alternation in power between the successor party and the democrats, peaceful transfers every time, divided government for most of the period with the presidency and the parliament in different hands, and a set of freedom ratings that put Mongolia alone among postcommunist countries outside eastern Europe in the free category by the end of the 1990s — a score of 2.5 where Kazakhstan stood at 5.5, Uzbekistan 6.5, Turkmenistan 7, Russia 4.5 and China 6.5, and a press freedom ranking seventh of twenty-eight postcommunist states. Through the whole of that decade, with the economy in ruins and unemployment high, every survey found at least eighty-five per cent of Mongolians saying the 1990 transition had been the right step.

The ordinary Mongolian’s liberties were the by-product of an elite calculation about how expensive it should be to

buy the country. That is the residue theory, confirmed — with one variable changed from the version this collection has usually run.

The hard test, which is running now

Fish wrote in 2001 that the conditions which had made Mongolian democracy possible included several things normally counted as blessings and actually operating as curses: no superabundance of mineral wealth, no great strategic significance and therefore no external patron backing a particular leader, no regional-power ambitions, no national father figure at the moment of regime change, and no constitution concentrating power in the executive. And he named the hazard on the horizon. If Mongolia's hopes of great mineral wealth were realised, he wrote, the state could become little more than a battleground for actors seeking control of the proceeds, and that would critically endanger democratisation. He quoted a presidential chief of staff who had told him in 1998 that the country needed "one person who can take charge of everything."

Twenty-five years later the hazard has arrived, and the module can report the test rather than predict it.

Mining is now more than a quarter of Mongolian GDP and the country's growth is driven by it. Oyu Tolgoi and Erdenet dominate the export accounts; China takes something over ninety per cent of Mongolian exports. In a Sant Maral poll of May 2024, Mongolians named mining corruption as the country's single biggest problem. In 2022 there were street protests over alleged theft at the state coal enterprise. In June 2025 a prime minister lost a confidence vote and left office after public outrage at his son's lavish engagement party, having shortly before antagonised mining interests by pursuing a sovereign wealth fund on the Norwegian model; his successor holds the premiership together with the party chairmanship, a combination that the

speaker of parliament publicly called undemocratic and a threat to checks and balances.

The structural protections have thinned in the direction the design did not anticipate. Divided government — the presidency and the parliament in different hands, which had checked both parties for most of two decades — ended in 2021 when the ruling party took both. International IDEA records significant declines between 2019 and 2024 in civil liberties, economic equality, freedom of expression and freedom of the press. An assessment published in January 2026 describes the year's politics as a slide toward electoral autocracy.

Against that: the country is still rated free, alternation continues, the 2024 election produced a coalition of the ruling party with the democrats and a third party, an OSCE mission found the polls well run, and the V-Dem indices show the long decline from 2015 interrupted by an uptick in 2025. The thing is under strain. It has not gone.

Reading plurality against the framework

Two results, one confirming and one that revises the mechanism.

The confirming one can be brief. **Formal separated institutions do no work of their own.** Mongolia held, for seventy years, a fuller set of them than any Soviet republic — a constitution with a rights chapter, a legislature, courts, a procuracy, an army, a currency and an actual seat at the United Nations — and was not thereby less foreclosed. Every one of those bodies was staffed from one list, and a body that cannot lose anything cannot defend anything. Where a study finds an impressive institutional architecture, the question to ask is not what powers the documents assign but what each institution holds that the apex could take from it, and what happened the last time one of them said no.

The revision is the module's contribution, and it concerns where the residue comes from.

This collection's account has been that liberties precipitate out of *domestic* factional conflict — several groups each holding a share, each fencing itself against the others, the fences becoming rules. Mongolia in 1992 had no such factions. Its elite was a single apparatus that had just divided in two, both halves educated in the same Soviet institutions, sharing a formation and a class position, with no independent bases and, on the scholarship, no substantial policy disagreement. On the standard account there was nothing there to generate a residue.

A residue formed anyway, and the reason is that the mechanism does not actually require domestic rivals. **It requires only that whoever writes the rules fears capture — and the feared capturer can be a foreign state rather than a domestic faction.** Mongolia's drafters were not protecting themselves from each other. They were raising the price of the country to Russia and to China, by multiplying the number of officials a foreign power would have to purchase in order to own it. The mechanism is identical — deliberate expensive dispersion of power by people who fear a specific capture — and the by-product is identical: rules that, once written, protect everybody.

Two consequences follow, and the second is the one worth carrying.

First, this widens the conditions under which liberty can appear. The standard account implies that a society without a plural elite is unlikely to develop protections, which is a counsel of some despair for post-colonial and post-communist states whose elites are homogeneous by construction. Mongolia shows a second route: a homogeneous elite that has recently experienced foreign capture and expects to experience it again will disperse power for its own reasons, and the citizen collects the difference. The condition is not plurality. It is a credible fear of being bought.

Second — and this is the sharper half — the protection is shaped by the fear, and decays when the threat changes shape. A dispersed constitution designed to make foreign purchase expensive raises the price of *that* transaction. It does not automatically raise the price of domestic capture by the people who control a rent, because that was not the transaction being priced. And a country whose wealth was in livestock — dispersed across two hundred thousand households, uncapturable by seizing any building — is a different object from a country whose wealth is in three or four pits and the licences that govern them. The design was drawn against the first threat. The second arrived twenty years later and the design has less purchase on it, which is precisely what the erosion since 2019 looks like: not a coup, not a strongman, but a slow concentration around the rents, with the formal architecture intact and thinning.

So the diagnostic the collection should carry out of this module is a question to put to any set of liberties anywhere: **what were the people who wrote these rules afraid of?** Whatever the answer, those liberties will be robust against that thing and weak against everything else — because a protection is not a general good that happens to have been installed, it is a shaped instrument built to obstruct one specific purchase, and when the purchase changes the instrument does not adapt on its own. Rights that were won against a king protect against kings. Rights that were won against a foreign patron protect against foreign patrons. Neither was designed against a copper mine.

A note on sources.

Quoted briefly: the phrase describing the Mongolian drafters' aim as multiplying the number of persons who would have to be bought off, and the 1998 remark of President Bagabandi's chief of staff Sanjaagiyn Bayar that the country needed one person who could take charge of everything, are both from M. Steven

Fish, “The Inner Asian anomaly: Mongolia’s democratization in comparative perspective,” *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 34 (2001), pp. 323–338, which I have read in full and which is the single most important source for the second half of this module. Fish’s account of the constitutional debate rests on his own interviews in Ulaanbaatar in February 1998 with Boldbaatar, Dash-Yondon and Gonchigdorj, and on the Mongolian constitutional-historical literature; the reading of the socialist period as a single-man dictatorship under foreign control is his characterisation of Mongolian opinion, not a survey finding.

The Freedom House figures for the 1999–2000 survey — Mongolia 2.5, Kazakhstan 5.5, Kyrgyzstan 5, Tajikistan 6, Turkmenistan 7, Uzbekistan 6.5, Russia 4.5, China 6.5, and Mongolia’s press freedom score of 29, seventh of twenty-eight — are as tabulated by Fish from Freedom House. The finding that at least eighty-five per cent of Mongolians in every survey of the later 1990s called the 1990 transition the right step is Fish citing Luvsandendev Sumati’s Sant Maral polling. Current material — mining above a quarter of GDP, China taking over ninety per cent of exports, mining corruption named the country’s largest problem in Sant Maral’s May 2024 poll, the 2022 protests over the state coal enterprise, the June 2025 confidence vote and the circumstances around it, the combination of premiership and party chairmanship and the speaker’s objection to it, the 2024 election and coalition, and the OSCE assessment — comes from Freedom House’s 2024 and 2025 country reports, the Congressional Research Service brief of February 2025, *The Diplomat*, East Asia Forum’s January 2026 review, International IDEA’s democracy tracker, and the Mongolia Focus discussion of the V-Dem indices. Reports of backsliding are assessments by outside institutions with methodologies that are themselves contested, and they are reported here as assessments.

The Lkhümbe Affair figures are contested and both counts are given: over 1,500 implicated with 56 executed in one account, and 317 repressed across the Khentii, Dornod and Ulaanbaatar

groups with 53 executions in another. Lkhümbe's conviction on 25 June 1934 and execution on 30 June, his prior role in suppressing the 1932 rising, and the forged letter that began the affair are from the reference literature resting on Baabar and on Mongolian sources. The estimate that eighty to ninety per cent of high-ranking military personnel were killed in 1937–39 comes from a source I regard as unreliable individually and is given here as an order of magnitude consistent with the better-attested destruction of the officer corps; it should not be cited without a better authority. The reported exodus of over ten thousand Kazakhs to Xinjiang at the end of the 1930s comes from the same weak source and is flagged rather than relied upon.

The institutional material — three constitutions with rights chapters, the People's Great Khural, the acquittal rate before the Extraordinary Plenipotentiary Commission, the nomenklatura, the aimag structure, Bayan-Ölgii's creation in 1940 and Kazakh-language schooling from the 1940s — is drawn from the Library of Congress country study, from Ölziibaatar via Kaplonski, and from Minority Rights Group and the scholarly literature on Kazakhs in Mongolia. Batmönkh's refusal to sign the crackdown decree is recorded in the reference literature on the 1990 revolution and rests on the recollections of participants; it is the kind of founding story a democracy has reason to preserve, and although it is widely and consistently reported I have not seen a documentary source.

Two cautions. First, this module argues that Mongolian liberties are a residue of an anti-capture calculation rather than of domestic factional conflict, and that argument rests substantially on one scholar's interviews conducted six years after the fact. It is the best evidence available and it is a single strand. Second, the assessment of Mongolia's present condition is genuinely contested — the same year that produced a headline about slippage into electoral autocracy also produced a coalition government, a well-run election and an uptick in one of the major indices — and this module deliberately reports the strain

without predicting the outcome, because the case is still running and the honest position is that nobody knows.

Part of the collection Patterns of Power. *Tested, never revealed.*

Module Ten

A YEAR FOR EACH OBSTACLE

Module 10 (revised) · Change and Collapse — why the apex did not do what the apex had always done; how a country of two million came to appear on a list of three items that Beijing required Moscow to clear; and the difference between an asset that stops paying and an asset that has already been spent

A case study in the Patterns of Power series · Thomas J. Bryan with Claude (Anthropic) · held as tested, not revealed

A note on this revision

The first version of this module located the decisive calculation in Ulaanbaatar — in a general secretary declining to sign a crackdown decree in March 1990. That was an error of level. Batmönkh's decision was real and it mattered, but it was downstream, and treating it as the cause commits precisely the mistake this collection exists to avoid: reading a subordinate's choice as an independent act when the subordinate held no independent floor.

The apex was in Moscow. Every instrument that had ever suppressed a Mongolian challenge belonged to Moscow or answered to it. The lists in 1937 came from Frinovsky. Genden and Amar were tried and shot in the USSR. Tsedenbal, after forty-four years, was removed by a decision taken in Moscow while he was visiting it. In March 1990 there were still forty to seventy thousand Soviet troops in the country with something like eighteen hundred tanks, against ten people on hunger strike in a square. No Mongolian was going to change anything against an intact Soviet state, and the Soviet state was intact.

So the question is the right one and this module should have opened with it: **what changed Moscow's cost-and-benefit of holding Mongolia?** The answer turns out to be documented, dated, and considerably more specific than a general story about Soviet decline.

What Mongolia was for

Seventy years of expenditure require a reason and this study has already established what it was. The extraction ledger runs the wrong way: exports of some $388 million against imports of $1.0 billion in the mid-1980s; credits at around thirty per cent of Mongolian GDP annually; an accumulated obligation of 11.4 billion transferable roubles, roughly ten times the country's output, eventually written off at ninety-seven per cent. Moscow was not taking wealth out of Mongolia. It was putting wealth in, continuously, for decades.

What it was buying was position: the absence of a hostile army on fifteen hundred miles of Siberian frontier, and a garrison space forward of that frontier. The premium was paid in credits and the claim was drawn in crises — one in five of the horses at the Soviet front in 1943 to 1945, and from the 1960s a basing area for divisions facing China.

That is the whole of the asset. Mongolia produced copper, wool and hides, all of which the Soviet Union had in abundance itself. It was worth holding because of who it sat between.

Which means the value of the asset was entirely a function of one variable: the state of Moscow's relations with Beijing. And in the second half of the 1980s Moscow deliberately changed that variable.

The three obstacles

From 1982 the Chinese had stated, publicly and repeatedly, the conditions on which relations with the Soviet Union could be

normalised. There were three, and they were known in both capitals as the three obstacles: the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan; Soviet support for Vietnam's occupation of Cambodia; and the Soviet military concentration on China's northern border — which, in the American intelligence assessment's own words, meant "the Soviet military buildup in Mongolia as well as along the Sino-Soviet border."

Read that clause again, because it is the module. Mongolia was not a country that would be affected by a Sino-Soviet settlement. Mongolia was **one of the three items on the bill.**

Deng said so himself, on American television in September 1986, offering to go to Moscow — a journey he had refused for a quarter of a century — if Gorbachev took a solid step toward removing the three obstacles. And Gorbachev had already made his opening move. In the speech at Vladivostok on 28 July 1986 that reoriented Soviet policy toward Asia, he proposed the reduction of Soviet troops in Mongolia and in Afghanistan as the concrete gesture toward breaking the deadlock. The State Department's own analysis at the time identified exactly that: a major initiative designed to break a decades-long impasse, whose substance was the reduction of Soviet forces in Mongolia and Afghanistan.

Then it was executed. The withdrawal from Mongolia began in 1987. On 7 December 1988, at the United Nations, Gorbachev announced unilateral cuts in Soviet conventional forces in Europe *and along the Chinese border*. The last troops left Afghanistan in February 1989. And in May 1989 Gorbachev went to Beijing, where the Soviet Union pledged to withdraw from Mongolia, from the Soviet Far East and from Afghanistan, and accepted the Chinese position on the river boundaries.

The exchange in that room, as the Soviet record preserves it, is as compact a statement of what had happened as anything in the archive. Deng recalled the message he had sent three years earlier — that he would meet Gorbachev if the three obstacles were overcome. Gorbachev replied that Deng had raised three

obstacles and it had therefore taken three years: **a year for each obstacle.** Deng then said that Sino-Soviet relations could now officially be declared normalised, and the two men shook hands.

That is nine months before the hunger strike in Sükhbaatar Square.

The difference between an asset that stops paying and one that has been spent

Here is why this matters more than a general account of Soviet decline, and why it answers the question the module was asked.

An asset that becomes unprofitable is a candidate for disposal. Its holder may hang on, subsidise it, argue about it, and defend it for reasons of prestige or inertia long after the accounts say to let it go — which is exactly what European metropoles did with colonies for decades after the arithmetic turned. Unprofitability is a slow, contestable, reversible condition.

An asset that has been given as consideration in a completed transaction is in a wholly different position. It is not being reassessed. It has been transferred, and the party that transferred it has already received what it was paid for. **By March 1990, Mongolia was not a strategic holding under review. It was a payment that had cleared.** The divisions were leaving under a commitment made to Beijing in exchange for the normalisation of relations with China — the largest strategic prize available to Soviet foreign policy in Asia and one that Gorbachev had spent three years and two other clients acquiring.

Now put the question directly. In March 1990, ten people on hunger strike in the capital of a client state, and a Mongolian party leadership that would obviously have used force if instructed to. Why not instruct?

Because using the troops in Mongolia to suppress a Mongolian political movement would have required Moscow to reverse the specific commitment that had bought normalisation with

China — and to do it in the country that had been named as one of the three obstacles, using the very forces whose removal had been the consideration. It would not have cost a general loss of face. It would have voided the deal.

Moscow did not decline to kill the Mongolian counter-elite. Moscow had already sold the reason for being able to.

That is the answer to the module's question, and it has the property that a good answer to a counterfactual should have: it explains not just why the killing did not happen but why it was not seriously available as an option.

The other two ledgers

Two further repricings were running at the same time and both reinforced the first without being sufficient on their own.

The money. The Soviet Union's hard-currency position collapsed in the mid-1980s. On the CIA's retrospective figures, hard-currency export earnings fell from about $32 billion in 1983–84 to $25.1 billion in 1986, with oil earnings alone falling from a 1982–84 average of $15.2 billion to roughly $7 billion by the end of 1986; gross hard-currency debt nearly doubled from about $22 billion in 1984 to $41.2 billion by the end of 1987, and stood at around $55 billion by 1989. The response is visible in one number that bears directly on the periphery: the Comecon share of Soviet oil sales fell from forty-six per cent in 1980 to sixteen per cent in 1990, as Moscow diverted crude from the bloc to the world market to earn currency. The subsidy to the clients was being cut precisely because the centre needed the cash.

That said, this ledger should not be overstated and there is a serious scholarly position against doing so. Leon Aron's argument — that the Soviet budget deficit was under two per cent of GDP in 1985 and under nine per cent through 1989, that oil in real terms was dearer in 1985 than in 1972, that the financial

crisis did not become acute until 1988 and could have been averted as late as the summer of 1990 — is a direct challenge to the story of a state driven to abandonment by insolvency. And there is an arithmetic that supports him: on one estimate the domestic agricultural subsidy alone came to 93.5 billion roubles in 1989 against a budget deficit of 91.8 billion, so that a state willing to raise its own bread prices could have balanced its books without shedding a single client.

The honest conclusion is that the money made the empire uncomfortable rather than impossible, and that a Politburo determined to hold Mongolia could have afforded to. What made it not want to was that it had found something it wanted more.

The doctrine. By December 1988 the instrument had been publicly renounced. At the United Nations on the seventh of that month, Gorbachev said that freedom of choice was a universal principle and that there should be no exceptions to it, and that force and the threat of force "neither can nor should be the instruments of foreign policy." He announced the troop cuts in the same speech. Ten months later, on 25 October 1989, the foreign ministry spokesman Gennadi Gerasimov gave the policy its joke name on American breakfast television — every country decides on its own which road to take — and by then the first non-communist government in Poland since the 1940s had already taken office. Through that autumn six governments in Eastern Europe fell and no Soviet unit moved.

So by the time the Mongolian Democratic Union assembled in front of the Youth Cultural Centre on 10 December 1989, the proposition that Moscow would not intervene had been stated by the general secretary at the United Nations, named by his spokesman, and tested six times in three months by other people. The Mongolians did not have to be brave in the way the Hungarians in 1956 had to be brave. They had to read a newspaper.

And there is one final item of timing worth recording without making too much of. Two days after the Mongolian Politburo dis-

solved itself, on 11 March 1990, Lithuania declared independence. Moscow in that spring was facing secession inside its own borders while negotiating the terms on which Germany would be reunified. Whatever attention it had for a client state in Inner Asia was attention it was spending elsewhere.

What was left for Ulaanbaatar to decide

This does not make the Mongolian actors into automata, and the module should be careful here in the direction opposite to its first error.

What Batmönkh had in front of him in March 1990 was a decree, an intact domestic apparatus, and a foreign guarantor that had publicly renounced intervention, was physically withdrawing under a contract with China, and was preoccupied with its own dissolution. Signing was still physically possible. Romania's leadership, that same December, had tried the equivalent and had shot several hundred people; Ceaușescu was dead within a week. What Batmönkh lacked was not the means but the backing, and every account of the man also suggests he had a personal rule against using force, which he had held to before and held to then.

The two readings are compatible and this study does not need to choose. A ledger that permits a decision and a man disposed to make it are not competing explanations; the first is why the decision was survivable and the second is why it was made rather than merely available. What can be said structurally is that no Mongolian general secretary before 1986 had a ledger that permitted it, and that is a fact about Moscow rather than about Mongolian character.

Reading the collapse against the framework

The collection's account of structural change offers four cracks — fracture, exhaustion, conquest, overbreeding — and this case

has now been examined twice. The revision produces a cleaner finding than the first attempt.

A positional holding is not shed when it becomes unprofitable. It is shed when the apex settles with the power the holding was insurance against — and at that moment its value does not fall to zero but goes negative, because its evacuation is the consideration in the settlement.

This follows directly from what the extraction module established about this family of possessions. A buffer's return is not an income stream but a contingent payout against one named adversary. It therefore has no standalone value at all: it is an insurance policy, and an insurance policy is worth exactly what the insured risk is worth. Cancel the risk by treaty and the policy is not merely worthless — it is an obstacle, because the counterparty's price for cancelling the risk is that you stop holding it.

That gives the family a collapse diagnostic it did not have, and the diagnostic is different from the general one. Fiscal exhaustion explains why an empire in general becomes burdensome; it does not explain the sequence, and it will mislead anyone who tries to read the sequence off it. **To know which piece goes first and when, look not at the metropole's accounts but at the state of its relations with the specific power each holding was acquired against.** Mongolia did not go because it had become expensive — it had always been expensive, and the Soviet Union could still have afforded it. It went because Moscow decided to buy something from Beijing that could only be paid for with Mongolia.

Three consequences follow.

First, this sharpens the general point the collection has made about metropolitan will in the European cases. The observation there is correct as far as it goes: after two world wars the metropole was exhausted militarily and fiscally, its cost-benefit changed, and no colonial movement was defeating an intact metropolitan army — the will was what had gone, not the capa-

city. But exhaustion is a background condition, and background conditions do not have dates. What has dates is the transaction. **Look for what the metropole was buying with the thing it gave up, and from whom** — a settlement with a rival, a purchase of alliance, an accommodation with a creditor — because the shedding of a possession is usually a payment rather than a write-off, and the payee is normally identifiable.

Second, the energy from below is placed exactly. The Mongolian demonstrators did not force this, and the framework's hard claim survives intact: three hundred graduates in December and ten hunger strikers in March did not move a state that had killed twenty to forty thousand people in eighteen months and could have cleared the square before lunch. But they were not irrelevant either, and the position they occupied is precise. When the guarantee is withdrawn, someone has to be standing in the square, or nothing happens at all — as nothing happened in the several client states where no one was. They did not crack the floor. They were the people who arrived at the crack, and arriving requires courage even when the crack was made three years earlier by two men in Beijing shaking hands.

Third, and this bears on how the whole family of dependencies should be read, the case shows that a client's fate can be decided in a negotiation to which the client is not a party and in which it appears as an item rather than an interlocutor. Mongolia's seventy years of sovereignty, so expensively bought and so carefully witnessed, did not put it in the room. It was discussed in Beijing in May 1989 by two men neither of whom was Mongolian, as one of three obstacles to be cleared, and the clearing of it was announced in a joint statement it did not sign. **The formal independence was real in law and was worth exactly nothing at the moment it would have mattered most** — which is the sharpest possible commentary on what that sovereignty had been for, and is consistent with everything this study has found about it since the landscape.

A note on sources.

Quoted directly. Gorbachev's exchange with Deng Xiaoping in Beijing on 16 May 1989 — Deng's recollection of the message about the three obstacles, and Gorbachev's reply that three obstacles had accordingly required three years, a year for each — is from the Soviet record of the meeting held in the Wilson Center Digital Archive, in the published English translation. Gorbachev's statements at the United Nations on 7 December 1988, that freedom of choice is a universal principle admitting no exceptions and that force and the threat of force neither can nor should be instruments of foreign policy, are from the address as reproduced in the Seventeen Moments in Soviet History archive and in the standard excerpts. Deng's condition, stated to Mike Wallace of CBS in September 1986, that he would meet Gorbachev if a solid step were taken toward removing the three obstacles, is from the published text of that interview. Gerasimov's remark of 25 October 1989 is quoted from the contemporary reporting of it.

The identification of Mongolia as one of the three obstacles is the module's load-bearing claim and rests on several independent sources: a declassified CIA assessment naming the obstacles as Afghanistan, Cambodia, and the Soviet military buildup in Mongolia as well as along the Sino-Soviet border; a State Department policy planning memorandum of 1986 identifying the substance of the Vladivostok initiative as the reduction of Soviet troops in Mongolia and Afghanistan; contemporary reporting in the *Christian Science Monitor*; and the Chinese foreign ministry's own retrospective account, which records that after twelve rounds of consultations between 1982 and 1988 the Soviet Union began withdrawing from Mongolia and Afghanistan and undertook to press Vietnam on Cambodia, at which point the two governments moved to normalisation. The 1989 summit's pledges — withdrawal from Mongolia, the Soviet Far East and Afghanistan, and acceptance of the Chinese position on the

river boundaries — are as recorded in the reference literature on the summit.

Soviet economic figures. Hard-currency export earnings of about $32 billion in 1983–84 falling to $25.1 billion in 1986, oil earnings falling from $15.2 billion to about $7 billion, and gross hard-currency debt rising from about $22 billion in 1984 to $41.2 billion by the end of 1987, are from the CIA's 1988 retrospective as cited in recent economic-historical writing; gross external debt of about $55 billion for 1989 is from the standard reference compilation. The fall of the Comecon share of Soviet oil sales from forty-six to sixteen per cent between 1980 and 1990 comes from the same recent treatment and I have not verified it against a primary series; it is a striking figure and should be checked before being relied on. The counter-argument is Leon Aron's, in his essay on the Soviet collapse for the American Enterprise Institute and *Foreign Policy*, that the budget deficit was under two per cent of GDP in 1985 and under nine per cent through 1989, that oil was dearer in real terms in 1985 than in 1972, and that the financial crisis was avertable as late as mid-1990; his position is given here in his own terms because the module's argument is stronger if the fiscal explanation is weaker rather than despite it. The estimate that Soviet agricultural subsidies of 93.5 billion roubles in 1989 exceeded the budget deficit of 91.8 billion derives from Byung-Yeon Kim's work and is reported at one remove; the writer reporting it says he has not independently verified it in full, and neither have I.

Everything concerning the Mongolian events of December 1989 to March 1990 — the founding of the Mongolian Democratic Union, the hunger strike, the unsigned decree, the Politburo's dissolution, and the personnel involved — repeats the sourcing given in the first version of this module and is unchanged by this revision. Soviet troop numbers in Mongolia and the withdrawal chronology repeat Module 7's sourcing.

Two cautions. First, the module argues that Mongolia's evacuation was consideration in a completed transaction rather than a

response to decline, and that argument rests on the sequence of public commitments rather than on any internal Soviet document weighing Mongolia's value. If a Politburo discussion exists in which the Mongolian garrison is assessed on its own merits and found wanting, the argument would need adjusting; what is shown here is that the withdrawal was publicly offered, publicly demanded, publicly executed and publicly closed as part of a named exchange. Second, the counterfactual at the heart of the module — that intervention in March 1990 would have voided the Chinese settlement — is a judgement about what Moscow would have thought, not a documented finding, and a reader who believes Gorbachev could have suppressed a Mongolian movement without disturbing the Beijing relationship should say so; the module's reply would be that the forces available for the suppression were the same forces whose removal was the consideration, which is a harder thing to explain away than a general loss of face.

Part of the collection Patterns of Power. *Tested, never revealed.*

Module Eleven

A MILLION TONNES, AND FORTY THOUSAND

Module 11 · The Grim Accounting — the sword's column set out in full and in ranges; against it, at equal weight, the coordination the order genuinely performed, including the five hundred thousand hectares of wheat that came to supply more than half the calories a Mongolian ate; the note called in 1991 when the fodder went from a million tonnes to forty thousand; and the question of why a country that destroyed its coordination as completely as Kazakhstan had in 1930 buried its animals rather than its people

A case study in the Patterns of Power series · Thomas J. Bryan with Claude (Anthropic) · held as tested, not revealed

The two errors this module exists to refuse

There are two ways to write this module badly and each is the mirror of the other.

The first is the conqueror's syllogism: that because *some* coordinating order is necessary, *this* one was justified — that the schools and the clinics and the fodder reserves settle the account, and the dead of 1937 were the price of modernity. That argument is available here in unusually strong form, because the works were unusually real, and it must be refused, because a necessary function does not license the particular hands that performed it or the methods they used.

The second is the sentimental mirror: that because the price was terrible the works were worthless — that literacy going from under nine per cent to over eighty was a veneer, that the hospitals were propaganda, and that a herdsman who kept his animals alive through a dzud because a cooperative had stored

hay for him was merely being managed. That is equally false and it costs more than it looks, because if the coordination was not real then its destruction cost nothing, and the whole metabolic question disappears.

The discipline is to write both columns on facing pages and tear neither out. And the specific proposition this module tests is the harder half: that an advanced coordinating apparatus raises a population above the land's unaided carrying capacity, so that destroying the coordination collects the difference in death. The order is not purely parasitic. It does real work, and the work has a metabolic value that can be measured — usually, and terribly, only when it stops.

The sword's column

Set out in the order it was collected, with ranges where the counting is contested, and with the caution that every figure was produced by an interested party.

The conquest, 1919–1921. About a thousand dead in total across the Chinese occupation, Ungern's campaign and the Soviet-Mongolian advance on Urga. Ungern's own terror in Urga in February 1921 — the killing of Jews and of those identified as Bolsheviks — is documented in kind and I have not found a reliable count, which is itself a fact about the archive. By the standards of the conquests in this collection the founding violence here was very small.

The party's own, 1922–1924. Dogsomyn Bodoo, the lama prime minister, and Dambyn Chagdarjav, executed 31 August 1922. Soliin Danzan, shot during the Third Party Congress in August 1924.

The confiscations and the rising, 1929–1932. More than six hundred estates confiscated from 1929; the property of more than eight hundred religious and secular notables seized in 1931–32, with more than seven hundred heads of household killed or imprisoned. In the rising that followed: fifty-four of two

hundred and four captured insurgents shot at Rashaant; 614 rebels killed and 1,500 arrested across some fifteen engagements in June and July 1932; totals for the whole seven months usually given above fifteen hundred killed. The data are described as fragmentary by the sources that supply them.

The rehearsal, 1933–1934. The Lkhümbe Affair, begun on a letter forged by a junior functionary: over 1,500 people implicated and 56 executed on one count, 317 repressed across three regional groups with 53 executions on another, falling with particular weight on Buryat-Mongols. Lkhümbe himself convicted 25 June 1934 and shot five days later.

The Great Repression, 1937–1939. The Extraordinary Plenipotentiary Commission's own records: 25,588 condemned, 20,099 executed. Genden Tserendulam's compilation of names: 28,185 killed, some 17,000 of them clergy. The reference-literature range: 20,000 to 35,000, or three to five per cent of the population. A Mongolian symposium in 2007 offered 36,000 as a working figure and called it provisional; Kaplonski uses "upward of 36,000." D. Dashdavaa puts arrests at almost 57,000 with three in four shot, implying something near 43,000, and claims one adult male in eight was killed. Mongolia's presidential commission on the repressions has put the total at 100,000. Between seventeen and eighteen thousand lamas condemned to death; more than seven hundred monasteries destroyed, one Mongolian count giving 746. Thirty-six of the fifty-one members of the party's own central committee; 187 of the military leadership; two former prime ministers.

The tail, 1939–1947. Repression continued: Amar shot in the USSR in 1941, Dogsom executed the same year, Losol dead in a Soviet prison before trial. On D. Ölziibaatar's count, clergy constituted over half of those repressed across the whole period 1937 to 1947.

The wars. Mongolian forces fought at Khalkhyn Gol in 1939 and in the Manchurian campaign of August 1945. I have not loc-

ated reliable Mongolian casualty figures for either and do not offer any.

The exiles. Tömör-Ochir, expelled in 1962 and killed with an axe in 1985. The Lookhuuz group, twenty-five years by decree of the Council of Ministers in January 1965; Lookhuuz served eleven years as a shepherd and pig farmer, six in prison and eight more in internal exile before rehabilitation.

The silence. Fifty years in which the dead were not named, the graves not marked, the archives not opened, and public discussion discouraged or condemned. Mass graves found near Mörön in 1991 and at Khambyn Ovoo in 2003, the remains at the second all killed by a single shot to the base of the skull.

A defensible summary is that this order killed somewhere between twenty-five and forty-five thousand people, the great majority of them in eighteen months, out of a population of about three-quarters of a million.

The coordination column

Now the facing page, at equal weight and without hedging, because hedging here is a way of not doing the accounting.

Population. The 1918 census counted 542,505 Mongols. The 1956 census counted about 800,000; 1969, 1.5 million; 1989, 2.1 million. The country roughly quadrupled its people in seventy years, in the same seventy years in which it killed tens of thousands of them.

Literacy. Something under nine per cent of the over-eights could read in 1937 — fifteen and a half per cent of men, one point one per cent of women. Seventeen per cent overall by 1940. Eighty-three per cent by the late 1980s, in Mongolian, through a state school system built from nothing after the only educational institution the country had ever possessed was razed.

Medicine. A clinic at the district centre, maternity waiting homes in nearly every county, and a health system distributed

across a country of almost no population density. The World Bank's assessment seventeen years after that system's funding collapsed still found Mongolian health indicators markedly better than those of countries at comparable income, and attributed the gap to gains made in the socialist period.

Institutions. A national university in 1942, an academy of sciences, a codified literary standard, a publishing industry, a film studio, a railway, the industrial cities of Darkhan and Erdenet.

And, most consequentially for this module, food. Two things were built that had never existed in Mongolia and that bear directly on how many people the land could hold.

The first was arable agriculture. The area under wheat went from 200,000 hectares in 1960 to 533,000 in 1990, on virgin steppe brought under the plough in successive campaigns — with, as the World Bank's own assessment notes, virtually all the machinery, fuel, fertiliser and agrochemicals imported from the Soviet Union and supplied to the farms at heavily subsidised prices. By the end of the period Mongolia was self-sufficient in wheat and an occasional exporter, and was meeting more than eighty per cent of total domestic food demand. Wheat flour came to supply roughly fifty-nine per cent of the daily calories of an urban Mongolian and fifty-two per cent of a rural one.

Hold that number, because it is the metabolic core of the case. **By 1990 more than half of what a Mongolian ate was flour from grain grown on land that had been open steppe within living memory, using inputs from a single foreign supplier.**

The second was winter fodder. In 1989 Mongolia produced more than a million tonnes of it, alongside dug wells, constructed winter shelters, a veterinary service, and the administrative authority to move animals across district boundaries out of a stricken area. This study has already measured what that system was worth in the only denomination that matters on the steppe: in the dzud of 1944–45, before the cooperatives,

between 8.08 and 8.76 million animals died, thirty-two or thirty-three per cent of the national herd; in the comparably severe winter of 1967–68, with the fodder system in place, 2.6 million died, eleven point nine per cent.

The proposition, and why this case tests it well

The metabolic hypothesis holds that a coordinating apparatus is not merely extractive. It does real work — it moves food, stores against bad years, prevents epidemics, keeps the peace along a trade route — and that work raises the number of people the territory can support above what the land would carry unaided. The population then grows into the new ceiling. And the debt sits there invisibly, because a debt that is being serviced looks like no debt at all. Break the coordination and the note is called, and it is paid in death.

Mongolia is an unusually clean test of that proposition for four reasons.

The coordination was recent, so its beginning is dated. It was of a kind whose product is directly metabolic — calories and animal survival, not merely order or trade. Its destruction was rapid and near-total and can also be dated. And, uniquely, there is a control: the same doctrine had been applied to a neighbouring pastoral people sixty years earlier with a documented result.

The note called

The instruments went in three or four years and the numbers are as blunt as any in this study.

The cooperatives were dissolved in 1991 and 1992 and the herds distributed to households. What went with them was the apparatus: the fodder reserves, the wells, the shelters, the veterinary service, the marketing, the cross-boundary movement, and the Soviet money that had paid for all of it. **Fodder**

production, more than a million tonnes in 1989, was 40,000 tonnes in 2002. That is a collapse of about ninety-six per cent in the single input that had cut dzud mortality by two-thirds.

The arable sector went the same way, for the same reason: the machinery, fuel and fertiliser had all been imported at subsidised prices from a supplier that no longer existed. Wheat production declined steadily from 1994; commercial imports and food aid rose; by 2008 imports supplied about seventy per cent of the country's wheat. The country that had fed itself and exported grain was buying more than half its staple calories from abroad.

And the note came due in the herd. The dzud of 1999–2000 killed about a quarter of the national flock. Across 2000 to 2002 the country's animals fell from over 33 million to 23 million. In 2009–10 something like 8.5 to 9.7 million died, a fifth of the total, with families in some districts left with nothing and 769,000 people — more than a quarter of the population — affected. Where the fodder system had held mortality to twelve per cent in a severe winter, the mortality of the severe winters after its removal ran at twenty to twenty-five. The count of major dzuds since 1992 has already matched the total for the half-century from 1940 to 1991.

The human column of the same collapse is documented and it is bad. GDP fell for four consecutive years, 1990 to 1993, a cumulative loss of about a fifth of national income; the 1989 level was not regained until 2003 and the 1989 volume of foreign trade not until 2004. Ration tickets were issued. The 1995 Living Standards Measurement Survey found 36.3 per cent of households below the national poverty line, rising toward half on some measures, in a country where measured poverty had previously been close to nil because the state provided directly. The public health system's funding collapsed. Craig Janes and Oyuntsetseg Chuluundorj's study of maternal mortality in this period describes what followed as food shortages, reports of

famine, widespread unemployment and a collapse of public health and health care, with herding households thrown into an insecure subsistence mode of production, newly vulnerable to local variation in rainfall and forage, and many of them without access to traded staples. Household food insecurity, malnutrition and migration to the provincial centres and the capital were the result. Ulaanbaatar's population went from about 700,000 in 2000 to over 1.5 million by 2020, most of the increase arriving into the ger districts.

So the note was called and it was paid. The question this module has to answer is why it was paid in the currency it was.

Why the animals died and the people did not

Because the honest finding is that Mongolia did not have a famine. There were reports of famine, there was real hunger, there was malnutrition and a measurable public-health collapse and a decade of lost development — and there was no mass mortality event. The population did not fall. The metabolic note came due in a country whose coordination had been dismantled about as thoroughly as any in the record, and it was paid in dead animals, poverty, migration and stunting rather than in dead people.

The control case makes that outcome strange rather than unremarkable. In 1930 the Soviet Union collectivised the Kazakh nomads — the same doctrine, the same kind of pastoral economy, the same destruction of the seasonal movement that had made the steppe habitable at that density. Something between 1.3 and 2.3 million people died, on the order of forty per cent of the Kazakh population. Mongolia's own attempt at the same operation in 1929–32 lost seven million animals and produced a seven-month war, and was then reversed. And in 1991 the coordination was dismantled again, permanently, and almost nobody starved.

Four differences account for it, and stating them turns the metabolic hypothesis from a claim into a mechanism.

The asset was distributed rather than seized. In Kazakhstan in 1930 and in Mongolia in 1929 the state took the animals. In Mongolia in 1991 the state gave them back. A household with its own herd in a collapsing economy is poor and exposed; a household whose herd has been requisitioned is destitute. That distinction is the difference between a bad decade and a famine, and it is not a small point about property rights — it is the metabolic buffer itself, held in the hands of the people who need it.

Exit was open. The Kazakhs who tried to cross into China in 1931 were shot at the border. Mongolians in 1992 could and did move to the aimag centres and to Ulaanbaatar, where flour, coal and aid were arriving. That the ger districts are grim is true and is the module's point rather than an objection to it: a slum is what a called metabolic note looks like when the people can walk.

Substitution was available and arrived quickly. Mongolia joined the World Bank in February 1991, and became by one account the world's fifth-largest per capita recipient of foreign aid. Food aid and commercial imports replaced the collapsing domestic wheat. Whatever one thinks of the terms — and Morris Rossabi's standing criticism is that the conditions imposed took no account of the country's circumstances — the calories arrived.

The withdrawal was a collapse rather than a policy. Nobody in 1991 was trying to break the pastoral economy in order to remake it. The apparatus fell away because its financing evaporated, which meant there was no state effort to prevent people from coping. In 1930 the coordination was destroyed *by* the state, which then used its floor of force to stop the population from doing the obvious things — moving, eating the herd, leaving.

Reading the accounting against the framework

The metabolic proposition survives this case and is sharpened by it. The coordination was real, its metabolic value is measurable in two independent series — a third of the herd against an eighth in comparable winters, and half a population's calories from land that had been steppe — and its destruction called the note, on schedule, within a decade.

But the case establishes something the proposition as usually stated leaves out, and this is the module's contribution.

The destruction of coordination calls the note. It does not by itself determine the currency. The note is paid in mass death only where the destruction is accompanied by the closure of the three things a population uses to absorb it: possession of the productive asset, exit, and substitution. Where those remain open, the same metabolic gap is paid in poverty, in migration, in stunted children, in a decade of lost output, and in the deaths of animals rather than people — which is a real and heavy cost and is not a famine, and the difference between the two is the difference between Mongolia in 1992 and Kazakhstan in 1932.

This matters for how the collection reads other cases, in three ways.

First, it explains a puzzle the corpus has generated repeatedly. Some orders collapse and the countryside starves; others collapse and the harvest comes in. The usual explanation is the thickness of the coordination — whether the apparatus reached the subsistence metabolism or only governance and commerce. That is right and it is incomplete, because Mongolia's coordination reached all the way into the subsistence metabolism, further than most, and the collapse still did not kill at scale. The second variable is what the population was left holding and where it was allowed to go. **Coordination-depth**

predicts the size of the gap; asset, exit and substitution predict the currency it is paid in.

Second, it means the metabolic column can be missed entirely by anyone counting only bodies. Mongolia's note was substantial — on the order of ten million animals in the first three years of the century, a quarter of the herd in one winter, a poverty rate from near nil to a third or a half, and a national income that took thirteen years to recover — and none of it appears in a mortality table. An analyst looking for the famine would conclude the co-ordination had not been load-bearing, which is precisely wrong. **Where a population can absorb, the metabolic debt is discharged in ledgers other than the mortality one, and the analyst has to go and look for them.**

Third, and this is the item to carry into the final module, the note here was not defaulted on. It was refinanced. The metabolic gap that Soviet credits had covered from the 1950s was covered from 1991 by multilateral aid and food aid, and from the 2000s by copper and coal sold to China. The same population is still living above what its own pastoral and arable base would carry, and the difference is still being supplied from outside — only the creditor has changed, from one neighbour to the other. Nothing in the arithmetic of 1918 has been repealed: a country of half a million people and ten million animals became a country of three and a half million people, and the extra three million eat flour.

That is not an argument that the socialist order was justified, and this module will not make one. Thirty-six of fifty-one central committee members, seven hundred monasteries and something above twenty thousand people are not settled by a fodder statistic, and the men who built the schools were the men who signed the lists. It is an argument that the ledger has two columns, that both of them are large, and that a study which reports only one of them has not counted — because the works were real enough that their destruction had to be paid for, and

the killing was real enough that no quantity of works discharges it.

A note on sources.

The sword's column repeats the sourcing given in Modules 1, 2, 7 and 9 of this study and is not re-argued here: the 1921 casualty figure and the 1932 rising figures from the reference literature resting on Mongolian official histories, described by those sources as fragmentary; the Lkhümbe Affair counts from the reference literature in two incompatible versions, both given; the 1937–39 totals from the Extraordinary Plenipotentiary Commission's own records, from Genden Tserendulam's compilation reported in the press in 2001, from D. Ölziibaatar and D. Dashdavaa cited through Christopher Kaplonski, from the reference-literature range of 20,000–35,000 resting on Kuromiya and Atwood, and from Mongolia's presidential commission at the upper end. These are not reconcilable and are not reconciled. I have not located reliable Mongolian casualty figures for Khalkhyn Gol or for the 1945 Manchurian campaign and have therefore given none.

The coordination column. Census figures of 542,505 Mongols in 1918 (via Maiskii), about 800,000 in 1956, 1.5 million in 1969 and 2.1 million in 1989 are as sourced in Module 5. Literacy of 8.5 per cent of the over-eights in 1937 is Kaplonski citing Mongolian sources; 17.3 per cent in 1940 and 82.9 per cent in 1988 are Mongolian official statistics reproduced in the CIA *World Factbook* and the Library of Congress country study, produced by the state whose performance they measure. The World Bank's judgement that Mongolian health indicators remained strong for the country's income level and reflected socialist-era gains is characterised rather than quoted.

The metabolic material is the module's load-bearing evidence and its provenance should be stated carefully. The expansion of wheat area from 200,000 hectares in 1960 to 533,000 in 1990,

and the observation that virtually all machinery, fuel, fertiliser and agrochemicals were imported from the Soviet Union and supplied to farms at heavily subsidised prices, are from the World Bank's 1995 report *Mongolia: Prospects for Wheat Production* (report no. 13882-MOG), which is an outside institution assessing the sector at the moment of its collapse. The finding that Mongolia was self-sufficient in wheat and an occasional exporter until the mid-1990s, that production declined steadily from 1994, and that wheat flour supplies about fifty-nine per cent of urban and fifty-two per cent of rural daily caloric intake, is from a paper on Mongolian food demand and supply presented at Tokyo University of Agriculture. That imports supplied about seventy per cent of the wheat by 2008 is from press reporting. Fodder production of more than one million tonnes in 1989 against 40,000 tonnes in 2002 is from Oxford Business Group's Mongolia report; it is the single most important number in this module and it comes from a commercial business-intelligence publication rather than a scholarly or statistical source, which is a real weakness and should be corrected against the Mongolian agricultural statistics before the figure is relied on elsewhere.

The dzud series — 8.08 to 8.76 million animals and 32–33 per cent in 1944–45; 2.6 million and 11.9 per cent in 1967–68; a quarter of the herd in 1999–2000; the fall from 33 million to 23 million between 1999 and 2003; 8.5 to 9.7 million and twenty to twenty-two per cent in 2009–10 with 769,000 people affected — repeats the sourcing in Module 5 (a Taylor & Francis study of dzud and socialist pastoralism whose authorship I have not confirmed, the Association for Asian Studies teaching essay, the World Bank's dzud studies, and Rao and colleagues in *Environmental Research Letters*).

The transition's human cost. The four consecutive years of GDP decline to a cumulative twenty per cent is from Nixson and Walters; the recovery dates of 2003 for GDP and 2004 for trade from Mongolian analysis published in *The Diplomat*. The 1995

Living Standards Measurement Survey figure of 36.3 per cent of households below the poverty line, rising toward half on some measures and to 46 per cent absent social transfers, is reported at one remove and should be checked against the survey itself. Craig R. Janes and Oyuntsetseg Chuluundorj, "Free Markets and Dead Mothers: The Social Ecology of Maternal Mortality in Post-Socialist Mongolia," *Medical Anthropology Quarterly* 18:2 (2004), is the source for the characterisation of the transition's health effects and for the account of de-collectivised herding households; I have read its abstract and summaries rather than the article, which is a limitation given how much of this section rests on it. Ulaanbaatar's growth from about 700,000 in 2000 to over 1.5 million by 2020 is from the general literature on internal migration. Morris Rossabi's *Modern Mongolia* is named for the criticism of the international financial institutions and for the observation about aid dependence, and is used through reviews rather than read directly.

The Kazakh comparison — 1.3 to 2.3 million dead, on the order of forty per cent of the Kazakh population, and refugees shot at the Chinese frontier — rests on the standard reference account drawing on Sarah Cameron, Niccolò Pianciola and Isabelle Ohayon. It is used as a control case and its own counting is contested and politically live in both Kazakhstan and Russia.

Two cautions. First, the central claim of this module's closing — that Mongolia's metabolic note was paid in poverty and livestock rather than in human death because asset, exit and substitution all remained open — is a structural argument built from a comparison of two cases, and two cases do not establish a mechanism. It should be run against the other collapses in this collection before it is treated as more than a hypothesis. Second, the absence of a famine in 1990s Mongolia is asserted here on the basis that no mass-mortality event appears in the demographic record and that the scholarship describing the period speaks of food shortages and reports of famine rather than of a famine; if Mongolian-language sources or unpublished demographic work

show excess mortality on a scale the international figures miss, this module's central distinction would need revising, and a reader with access to that material should test it.

Part of the collection Patterns of Power. *Tested, never revealed.*

Module Twelve

THE OTHER HALF OF THE NATION

Module 12 · Convergence and Divergence — what the instruments returned when run over an arrangement its own participants never had a word for; the eight readings that came back the same as everywhere else and the seven that came back inverted; and the argument a Mongolian makes at the end of it, which rests on a control case of four and a half million people living two hundred miles to the south

A case study in the Patterns of Power series · Thomas J. Bryan with Claude (Anthropic) · held as tested, not revealed

What was run, and what was not asked

This study did not open by asking whether Mongolia was a colony, and it does not close by answering. The word carries a verdict inside it and the verdict is the reader's to reach or not reach. What it did instead was run a set of instruments built on other cases — a Norman conquest, a Roman settlement, an Ottoman levy, a French Algeria, a British Buganda, a Japanese Hokkaidō, a Russian Turkestan — over seventy years in Inner Asia, and record what came back.

The instruments were built to detect a specific structure. Not plunder, which is older and simpler, but the thing that follows plunder when the men with the swords decide to stay: organised violence that proves its superiority once and then need not be used continuously; a settlement dividing who holds what, made among the victors and carried forward by law; a story that makes the holding legible as something other than robbery, whether or not the men telling it believe it; a decision about how

the population will be formed — its schooling, its calendar, its religion, its language; a cost imposed on those who will not conform, sized to the resistance; an anxiety about what can be said; and, in the arrangements that last, a default under which each man in the hierarchy holds the whole thing up merely by defending his own place in it.

Here is what the instruments returned.

The readings that came back the same

Organised violence, proven and then economised. A partisan force of four hundred, doubled to eight hundred, behind a Soviet expeditionary corps of some ten thousand, took a capital in July 1921 at a total cost of about a thousand lives. Thereafter force was used rarely and enormously: a seven-month war against the country's own herders in 1932, and eighteen months in 1937 to 1939 in which between twenty and forty thousand people were killed out of three-quarters of a million. Then almost nothing for fifty years, because nothing more was needed. That is the standard curve with one deformation, which is dealt with below.

A settlement. It divided persons rather than land, because there was no land to divide, and it was made by a constitution translated in Moscow and produced from a prime minister's pocket in 1924, whose thirty-fifth article decided who counted as a full person and placed the disqualified in the same schedule as the mentally incapable. The property settlement followed later and twice.

A story. National liberation from Manchu and Chinese domination, told for seventy years, and — this is the divergence dealt with below — substantially true.

A decision about how the population would be formed. Comprehensive: the schooling built from nothing, the calendar, the alphabet changed twice in fifteen years, the clan names ab-

olished in 1925, and the destruction of the religious establishment that had held the country's entire literate tradition.

Cost imposed on non-conformers, sized to resistance. Precisely sized, and the sizing is visible: taxation and persuasion while the monasteries could still raise a district; annihilation when the apparatus was adequate to it; twenty-five years of internal exile for a central committee member in 1965; nothing at all for a herdsman who kept a statue behind a wall, because no state has the officers to search a hundred thousand gers.

Anxiety about information. A censor facing the conquered, the metropole and the apparatus itself; fifty years in which the dead of 1937 were not named; a foreign garrison that could not be concealed and an agreement authorising it that was secret and required its own secrecy.

A default. The tightest in this collection. Every position on a list administered by a Secretariat, nothing owned, nothing heritable, the family liable, and nowhere to defect to — no rival patron, no church after 1937, no private economy, no province. Sixty-two years of removals and not one removed man ever mounted a resistance.

And the common man did not change it. Three hundred graduates in December 1989 and ten hunger strikers in March 1990, against an intact apparatus that had killed tens of thousands and could have cleared the square before lunch. What moved was a guarantee, withdrawn in another capital for reasons that had nothing to do with them.

Eight instruments, eight readings, all within the range this collection has recorded elsewhere. Whatever this arrangement was, it was not structurally novel.

The readings that came back inverted

Seven came back the other way round, and they are the reason the case was worth running.

The story was addressed to the conquered rather than to the metropole — and it was true. The expectation from the European cases is a robe cut for the taxpayer and the conscript at home, with nothing spent on persuading the conquered. Here everything was spent on the conquered, and the claim they were given was accurate: the Manchu conquest had happened, the 1919 revocation had happened, and Xu Shuzheng's own plan of that April proposed Chinese settlement and intermarriage to transform Mongol custom. The study's finding was that accuracy makes a robe *more* binding rather than less, because a true claim must be continuously performed rather than merely asserted — a currency, an army, an embassy, a UN seat bought in the Security Council against Mauritania — and that its prohibitions cluster at its strongest point rather than its weakest, which is why the most tightly held document in the country turned out to be the one specifying the terms on which foreign divisions stood on its soil.

Formation was maximised, not withheld, and there was no ethnic ceiling. Literacy from under nine per cent to over eighty, in Mongolian, with a national university and an academy, at very great cost and under no compulsion. Every office in Mongolia was held by a Mongolian: the ministries, the army, the security organs, the mines. The ceiling was not on rank but on independence — a general secretary of forty-four years' standing could still be removed by a decision in another capital.

Extraction ran the wrong way in the visible accounts, and the accounts could not be settled. Compulsory delivery quotas and a farmgate price fixed in the 1960s and sealed off from every world price: that extraction ran from the herding household to the Mongolian state, continuously, and its direction is not in doubt. But between Ulaanbaatar and Moscow the flow reversed after the 1950s and the terms cannot be adjudicated, because the currency of settlement was a unit of account that no longer exists and was written off at ninety-seven per cent. Both

governments hold sincerely today that they subsidised the other, and both have a case.

The floor was laid twice, and the second was larger. Sixteen years apart, and between twenty and forty times the size, because the first took a government and the second went after the thing the population actually held. The force-over-time curve is U-shaped, and a study sampling it at the founding would file one of the most violent orders in this collection among the gentlest.

The exit dial was closed by provision rather than by barrier. In the least circumscribable terrain on earth — no fences, no walls, houses that fold in an hour — ninety-nine per cent of herding households stayed inside cooperatives for thirty years, because the state had made itself the fodder reserve standing between a family and the winter that would end it, and leaving meant keeping the steppe and losing the insurance.

The elite owned nothing, and collected in 1991. A settlement that granted its elite no property had not abolished the elite's property; it had deferred it. The note was presented at privatisation, when the only people in Mongolia with the information, the authority and the relationships to convert state assets into private ones were the people holding the posts.

And the sovereignty was real, expensive, and did not put Mongolia in the room. Seventy years of paying for a flag, a currency, an army and a seat — and in May 1989 the country was discussed in Beijing by two men, neither of them Mongolian, as one of three obstacles to be cleared, and its evacuation was the consideration in the deal.

The single addition

If this study contributes one thing to the collection rather than twelve, it is about positional holdings, and it took three modules to assemble.

A buffer is not held for what it yields. Its return is a contingent payout against one named adversary, drawn in crises and worth nothing in ordinary years — which is why its extraction column reads negative and why anyone totalling trade balances across the decades will conclude, wrongly, that nothing was being taken. What was being taken was drawn in 1941 to 1945, when a country of under a million people put a tenth of its population under arms and delivered one in five of the horses at the Soviet front at nominal prices.

And the consequence for how such a holding ends is the finding. **A positional holding is not shed when it becomes unprofitable. It is shed when the apex settles with the power the holding was insurance against — and at that moment its value does not fall to zero but goes negative, because its evacuation is the price of the settlement.** Fiscal exhaustion explains why an empire in general becomes burdensome; it has no dates and cannot explain a sequence. To know which piece goes first and when, look at the state of the metropole's relations with the specific power each holding was acquired against, and look for what the metropole was buying with the thing it gave up, and from whom.

The counter-position

Now the argument that has to be met, stated at its full strength and without softening, because a thesis that has not faced its best opponent has not been tested.

It runs like this.

In 1911 Mongolia was a Qing dependency of about half a million people. Over ninety per cent could not read. The four aimags owed Chinese trading houses nine million taels on the government's own estimate, and perhaps thirty million by the mid-1920s — reckoned by contemporaries at half the value of every animal in the country. There was no treasury worth the name, no army, no school system, no industry, no hospital. The

country's supreme religious authority was a Tibetan, by a decree of 1758 that had made it structurally impossible for a Mongol to hold the office. In November 1919 a Chinese general arrived with troops, extracted the revocation of Mongolian autonomy from ministers acting without their sovereign's signature, and required Mongols to prostrate themselves before a portrait of the President of China. His own written plan proposed encouraging Chinese settlement and intermarriage in order to transform the customs of the Mongols. Then a White Russian cavalry commander took the capital and began killing people in it.

Today Mongolia is a sovereign state of three and a half million people with a seat at the United Nations, a literacy rate near universal, a professional class of its own, health indicators better than its income class, a language that is the language of its own state, and — alone in inner Asia — a political system that outside observers have rated free for three decades, with repeated peaceful transfers of power.

And there is a control. The Mongol nation was divided, and the other half did not get a Soviet alignment. In Inner Mongolia there are today something over four million ethnic Mongols — roughly twice as many as live in Mongolia, if one counts only ethnic Mongols — in a regional population of about twenty-four or twenty-five million, of whom Han Chinese are seventy-nine per cent. Mongols are seventeen or eighteen per cent of the territory that bears their name. Between 1967 and 1969, the Chinese state investigated up to 790,000 people there for membership of a separatist party, killed on the official figure 16,222 of them and on other estimates as many as 100,000, and injured or persecuted several hundred thousand more. The party had ceased to exist in the late 1940s and its supposed reactivation was, as Beijing itself acknowledged in 1981, a fabrication. The revolutionary committee installed over the region in November 1967 contained no Mongols among its top leaders. And in 2020 the language of instruction in Mongolian-medium schools began

to be replaced with Mandarin, subject by subject, producing the largest public protests the region has seen — a herder from Xilingol telling a wire agency that almost every Mongolian in Inner Mongolia opposed the change, a parent saying that in twenty years the language would simply be forgotten.

The counter-position concludes: alignment with the north was the price of not becoming the south. It was a terrible price, and it was paid, and it bought the survival of a Mongol nation-state, a Mongol language in Mongol schools, and a Mongol population that has grown sevenfold. And when the Mongolian people were asked in July 1990 — genuinely freely, with the apparatus in visible retreat, with no way for anyone to check how they voted, on a turnout of ninety-eight per cent — they returned the party that had done all of it, with 343 of 430 seats.

That is not a weak argument. It is held sincerely by many Mongolians, it is supported by the closest natural experiment available anywhere on earth, and every factual claim in it is true.

Answering it without flinching

Three things can be said, and none of them makes the argument go away.

The first is that it compares outcomes rather than choices. No one in Mongolia in 1921 chose between Moscow and Beijing. Seven men from two underground circles in an occupied city went north because they wanted rifles, and were told at Irkutsk that the letter they had brought from the Bogd Khan would have to be rewritten in the name of a Party rather than a Khan. What followed was not a national decision taken with the alternatives on the table; it was a formation, of specific men, in specific institutions, over specific months, with a doctrine that had been written down in Moscow in June 1920 before any of them arrived — including the clause about the clergy of backward countries. The counterfactual of Chinese absorption is real

and it is doing genuine work in the argument. It was never on a ballot.

The second is that the comparison credits an arrangement with things it also inflicted. If the toll in Inner Mongolia is the argument for alignment, then the toll in Mongolia belongs on the same page. Between 1967 and 1969 the Chinese state killed, on its own figure, 16,222 Mongols out of an Inner Mongolian Mongol population then of perhaps a million and a half. Between 1937 and 1939 the Mongolian state killed between twenty and forty thousand of its own out of three-quarters of a million. In proportion, and in a shorter period, the independent Mongol state killed more Mongols than the Chinese state did. Both are true; neither cancels the other; and an accounting that reaches for one and not the other is not an accounting.

There is a further symmetry that has to be recorded rather than remarked upon. The instrument was the same in both places. In Ulaanbaatar in September 1937 the disposal for a decade of policy failure was Order 366's finding that many had fallen under the influence of Japanese spies and provocateurs. In Hohhot in 1968 the disposal was a fabricated separatist party said to be seeking independence with Soviet backing. In each case the foreign hand was the standard resolution for a domestic problem, and in each case the foreigner named was the other neighbour.

The third is that the survival was not the arrangement's purpose. Mongolia was not preserved as a state because Moscow valued Mongol nationhood. It was preserved because a buffer requires a flag and a flag requires a witness, and the fifteen-year campaign for the UN seat that ended with Zorin trading Mongolia against Mauritania in the Security Council is what that costs. And when the buffer stopped being needed, the flag was not defended. It was spent. The record of the transaction exists: Deng's three obstacles, Gorbachev's Vladivostok offer, the withdrawal begun in 1987, and the handshake in Beijing in

May 1989 — a year for each obstacle. Mongolia's independence was real in law throughout, and it was also, from the apex's side, an instrument, and the instrument was liquidated when the position it served was closed.

And then the thing that must be granted back, because the counter-position survives all three answers.

None of that makes the Mongolian who says *we survived* wrong. He did survive. His language is the language of his state and his children are schooled in it and his surname, if he has recovered one, is probably Borjigin. The man two hundred miles south is watching his own language leave the curriculum a subject at a time, and has no state to appeal to. Whether the survival was intended is a question about Moscow, and the answer appears to be no. Whether it happened is a question about Mongolia, and the answer is yes. Those are different questions and the second one is his.

What this case is a door into

This study was built on instruments made from European empires, and it ran them over an arrangement whose participants had no word for what they were inside — where *colony* was excluded by doctrine, *annexation* by the fact, *protectorate* and *satellite* by their provenance, and what remained were fraternal assistance, socialist internationalism and the international division of labour, all of which describe a relationship between equals with no asymmetry in it at all. The terms Mongolians now use to describe those seventy years were imported from outside the system after it fell, and are contested for that reason.

That absence is the case's last finding and the reason it belongs in this collection. **An order that forbids a fact must keep forbidding it; an order that never supplies a word is not maintaining anything, and the gap it leaves outlives it.** Every instrument this study carried was made somewhere else, on a case where the vocabulary existed, by people describing

something they had a name for. That the instruments returned readings here at all is a fact about the instruments and about what they were built to detect. What to call the thing they detected is not a question this study will answer, and the reader who has come this far has everything that was used to reach it.

A note on sources.

This module rests almost entirely on material sourced in the preceding eleven, and the provenance, ranges and limitations recorded there apply unchanged. The convergence and divergence sections are summaries and introduce no new evidence; a reader checking any figure in them should go to the module where it was first set out, since the caveats there are load-bearing and have been compressed here.

New material appears only in the counter-position and concerns Inner Mongolia. The purge of the Inner Mongolian People's Party is documented in Kerry Brown's *The Purge of the Inner Mongolian People's Party in the Chinese Cultural Revolution, 1967–69* (Brill, 2004), which I have not read and which is the authority; the figures used here — 16,222 deaths on the official post-Cultural Revolution appraisal reported in *People's Daily*, more than 340,000 injured, approximately 790,000 investigated, some 346,000 formally labelled — come from that book's summary, from the review of it in the *Journal of Asian Studies*, from Human Rights Watch's report on the region, and from reference compilations. The upper estimates run to 27,000 and to 100,000 and are given as a range because the counting is contested and politically constrained at the source. The Chinese Communist Party's acknowledgement that the alleged organisation had never in fact been reactivated appears in its Document No. 28 of 1981, cited here through Human Rights Watch. The observation that the revolutionary committee formed in November 1967 contained no Mongols among its top leaders is from the same report.

Population figures for Inner Mongolia — Mongols at seventeen or eighteen per cent of a regional population of twenty-four to twenty-five million, Han at seventy-nine per cent, with something over four million ethnic Mongols, roughly twice the number in Mongolia — are from Chinese census data as reported by the Associated Press, Human Rights Watch and the China Research Center, and the percentages differ slightly between sources and census years. The 2020 language policy and the protests are from AP, AFP, Al Jazeera, Human Rights Watch and the *Made in China Journal* explainer; the herder from Xilingol and the parent quoted on the language being forgotten are quoted at one remove from AFP and AP reporting respectively. Christopher Atwood's observation that public schooling in Mongolian carries for Mongols in China something of the weight that monasteries carry for Tibetans is paraphrased from the same explainer.

Two cautions, and they are the largest in the study. First, the counter-position set out above is a live political argument in Mongolia, in China and in Russia, and each of those countries has an interest in how it is resolved. It is stated here in the strongest form its holders would recognise, and the three answers offered to it are arguments rather than findings; a reader who weighs them differently is not thereby misreading the evidence. Second, the Inner Mongolian comparison is the most rhetorically powerful device in this study and is therefore the one most in need of suspicion. Inner Mongolia and Mongolia differed before 1921 in ways that bear on everything that followed — Inner Mongolia had been under closer Qing administration, had substantial Han settlement well before the revolution, and was agriculturally rather than purely pastorally organised over much of its territory. The two are not a controlled experiment with a single variable, and no argument in this module should be read as though they were.

Part of the collection Patterns of Power. *Tested, never revealed.*